Marxism Today

July 1987 95p

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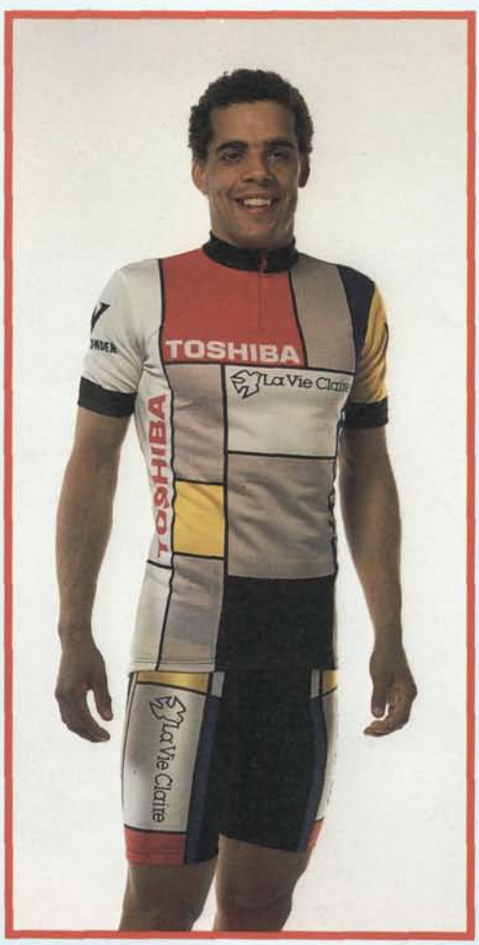

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Distribution
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Magnum Distribution Ltd, 22-26 Farringdon Lane, London EC1R 3AU
Bookshops
Central Books Ltd, 14 The Leathermarket London SE1 3ER
Subscriptions
Magnum Subscriptions Division, Unit 8, Grove Ash, Bletchley, Milton Keynes MK1 1BZ. Tel: 0908 71981
Subscription Rates
for one year
Inland
individuals £11.40, institutions £16, students one-year introductory rate £7.50, supporting subscribers £25.
Overseas airspeeded
individuals £20, institutions £26, supporting subscribers £34.

Contributions
The editor welcomes contributions and letters for publication in the journal. Further details if required from the editorial office. Please send SAE if you want an acknowledgement or *manuscript returned*. The views expressed by authors are personal and not necessarily those of the editor or editorial board.

Typeset
Type Generation Ltd
Printed
Birmingham Printers, Birmingham.

ABC
Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations

Published by the Communist Party
16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY
©World Copyright July 1987
Marxism Today
ISBN 0026-4118
Volume 31 Number 7

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Gulf Gamble

As Ronald Reagan enters the ultimate phase of his presidency, and his successors are already jostling for position in the 1988 presidential race, the US leader finds himself entrapped by the issue that so weakened his predecessor, Carter, and which provided the opening for Reagan himself, namely Iran. After entering the White House on a militantly anti-Iranian platform, and then trying to establish covert ties with the Khomeini regime, Reagan now faces a set of problems relating to Iran which allow of no easy solution or laid-back obfuscation. Khomeini must be amused indeed at the way in which his Islamic revolution has cornered what the Ayatollah has termed the 'wounded snake' in the White House.

The first issue relating to Iran is that of the investigation into the Irangate scandal. The Congessional hearings have not gone well for Reagan, and it is now almost universally accepted in the USA that the President has been both lying and incompetent. The glitter of his first years, presented as the 'Reagan Revolution', has gone. At best, Reagan can save some of his credibility and limp on for the next few months. It remains to be seen what additional revelations North and Poindexter provide, but whatever their contributions, the investigations as a whole have destroyed Reagan's attempt to re-establish the presidency as the undisputed centre of foreign policy making in the USA.

The consequences for Reagan's foreign policy are important. First, it will now be much more difficult for the USA to escalate in Central America. The prospect of a direct US military intervention against Nicaragua, a venture which would, were it launched, have a high probability of military success, has now receded. The contras may survive, but in depleted form. Secondly, Reagan is being impelled to look for diversions, in order to tide his presidency over the Irangate crisis. One such diversion is the apparently greater interest in a summit with the USSR, even at the risk of alarming the Europeans over an INF deal. But at the same time, the taste for the military gesture and for assertion of power that has so characterised this President – from Lebanon, to Grenada and Libya – remains: it is in this context that Reagan's new forward policy in the Gulf must be seen.

At first sight, the new US force projection in the Gulf appears perverse indeed. Only a year ago, US envoys were in Tehran offering arms to Khomeini and, in North's case, suggesting that the USA could arrange for the fall of President Saddam Hussein of Iraq, Iran's main war goal. Moreover, the incident that led to the new US presence in the Gulf was not an Iranian provocation, but the Iraqi attack on the USS Stark. However, the need felt in Washington to present a tough image after the Stark incident, coupled with the pressure to divert attention from Irangate, appears to have persuaded Reagan that a new militancy towards Iran is advisable. The Iranians may well not oblige with a direct challenge to the US navy, and the European allies, mindful of earlier US attempts to recruit them to Middle East policies that the US itself undermined, have been wary. But as a way of focusing US attention on a convenient foe, the Gulf is attractive.

There is, however, another reason for this new militancy towards Iran, namely the US failure to find rewarding interlocutors in Tehran itself. Some US officials, notably Robert McFarlane, appear to have believed that they could pull off an anti-Soviet strategic coup in Iran comparable to that which Kissinger achieved with his 1971 secret visit to Peking. The reality was very different: the Iranian leadership is neither united nor committed enough to abandon its long-standing hositility to the USA. As the documents of the Tower Commission Report indicate, McFarlane, faced with this

Kaveh Golestan/Network

Iran: Reagan's future in their hands

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disappointment and sitting irate in the Tehran Hilton, resorted to graphic terms in conveying to Washington his sense of frustration: 'It may be best for us to try to picture what it would be like if, after nuclear attack, a surviving Tatar became Vice President; a recent grad student became Secretary of State; and a bookie became the interlocutor for all discourse with foreign countries'. The attempt to open a channel of strategic collaboration with Iran was never realistic from the beginning.

Current short-term pressures aside, however, confrontation with Iran is not a simple option for any US administration. Iran's position on the southern frontier of the USSR, its growing involvement in support of the anti-Soviet guerrillas in Afghanistan, and its emergence as a major military power in the Gulf make it important for the USA to keep open the option of improving relations with Tehran. It is here that the deepest policy decision confronts Reagan: whether to downplay the importance of an understanding with Iran and seek greater cooperation with the USSR in the Gulf, or to work towards another opening to Iran in an attempt to consolidate an anti-Soviet alliance with the mullahs.

The increased US naval presence in the gulf is dictated above all by the strategic rivalry with Moscow, and Reagan has clearly rejected Soviet calls for great power collaboration in the region. Washington wants to prevent a greater Soviet role in the Gulf and appears, to date, to be committed to continuing support for the guerrillas in Afghanistan. The USA may be frustrated by Tehran's policies and attracted by the short-term gains of a naval clash with Iran. But in the longer run, if the rivalry with the USSR continues, Reagan or his successors will have to deal with Iran. The Tatar, the grad student and the bookie are very much in business and the 'wounded snake' or his successor may have to try again.●

Fred Halliday

Peace Of The Action

How far are *glasnost* and *perestroika* reaching into the Soviet Peace Committee? Some way, to judge by the recent presence in Moscow of an SPC-hosted END delegation (the first of its kind to go from END). But a key test will be the composition of any Soviet group attending the forthcoming END Convention in Coventry, which runs from July 15-19. Though essentially on a 'fact-finding' trip, part of the END mission (like that of the CND delegation which had shortly preceded it) was to press for the group to include some people from the hitherto much-harassed independent Moscow Trust Group, together with a broad range of cultural figures.

On the basis of its week in Moscow, the END delegation felt some grounds for optimism that the new mood may permit such an unprecedented Soviet representation at Coventry. One promising development is the recent formation of a number of 'Clubs'. Going under such names as the Club for the Friends of Science, the Club for Social Initiatives, and the Club for the Year 2050 (which aims to establish a new ecological system by that date), these groups are becoming centres of fervent debate around the context of *glasnost* and *perestroika*.

How far they are subject to restrictions remains unclear, as too does the potential they offer for a more independent style of political action. It seems that, at the present time, the constraints upon them are largely self-imposed. But clearly they preclude direct campaigning on sensitive issues like nuclear power, conscription or the militarisation of Soviet society. Moreover, while there is talk within the SPC of the need for 'detente from below' there is still also reference to the 'discredited' and 'insignificant' nature of the Trust Group. Perhaps the situation is best described as cautiously hopeful. ●

Kate Soper

John Sturrock/Network

Scotland: still searching for a new political identity

A Nation In Revolt

On June 11 Scotland did not (as Stuart Hall put it in last month's *Marxism Today*) 'capitulate to the Thatcherite future'. The Conservatives were left with only 10 of the 72 seats: these include Nicholas Fairbairn, Europe's best-known *Politiklown* and a number of gentlemen from the big-estate country still adjusting to the shock of 1945. To the remaining taxi-load of modern Tory cadres has been entrusted the task of guiding Scotland's semi-autonomous adminstration until 1992.

The impossibility is aggravated by the fact that their 62 parliamentary colleagues (50 Labour, 9 Alliance and 3 Scottish Nationalists) are united on more than anti-Thatcherism. All gave noisy electoral promises of action for Home Rule and looked forward – no doubt with varying degrees of hypocrisy – to an 'ungovernable' country. But it's at this point that some caution is required. Hall's alternative to capitulation is worth recalling too: that can now only consist in 'finding another way of imagining the future'. The Scots have not been able to do so yet, but the election has given them an almighty push in the right direction.

Conservatives are consoling themselves mainly with Mrs Thatcher's gimlet-eyed economism: Scotland is nothing but the fossil-redoubt of 'the North', a single morass of relative backwardness to be steadily reduced by the diffusion of (preferably private) drainage and forestry works outwards from the Centre.

On the Left southern Labourites have found another, oddly parallel kind of consolation in the belief that the Scottish redoubt at least will remain as a secure basis for future revival of British-Socialist fortunes: again, it's 'the North' (and Wales) who will eventually prove 'Britain' means something different by reconquering the South and Midlands.

Yet a more sober reckoning of the result ought to treat these scenarios with even more caution than 'Doomsday'. It is probably more accurate to treat the Scottish 1987 election as one more chapter in a longer-running story, best thought of as Scotland's search for new political identity. This was launched after the second world war by premonitory episodes like the Scottish Covenant of the early 1950s. 70s nationalism is its most spectacular manifestation so far, and its onward course has been beset by wrong turnings, giddy

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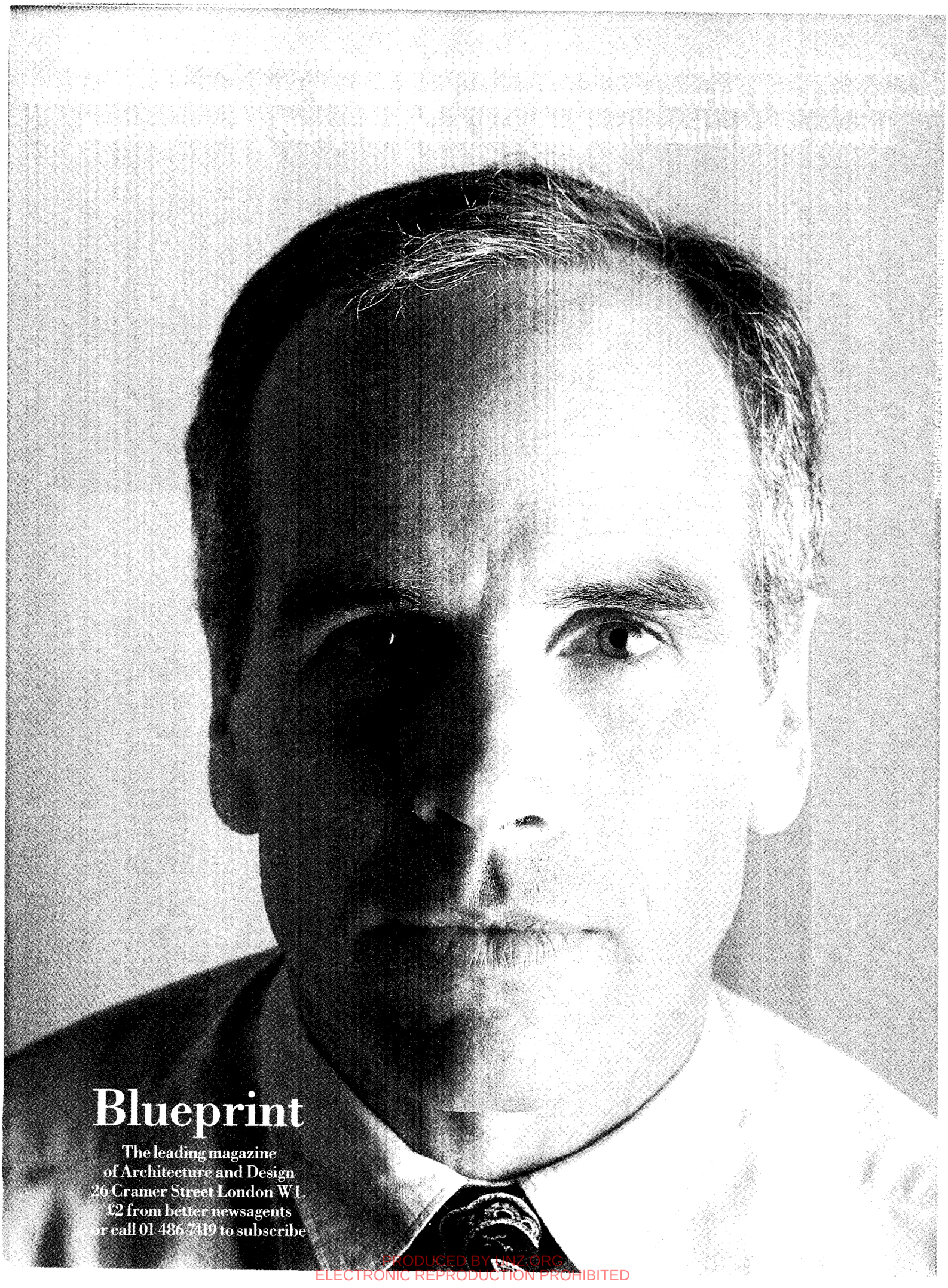
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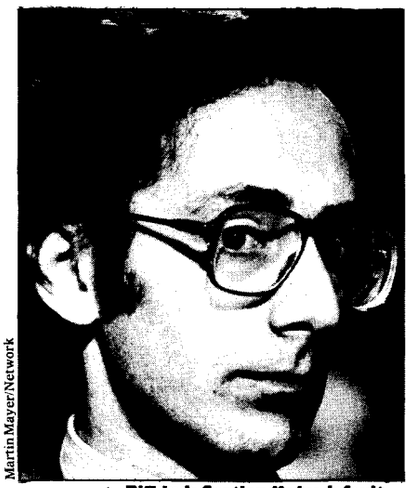
oscillations and an enfeebling lack of political self-confidence (often concealed by ranting, or Sunday-School prognostications like 'Doomsday').

The historical contradiction at the heart of the process is an interesting one. Scotland is far too strongly configured as a nation (above all in institutional terms) to renounce nationality. Yet internal division has robbed it of the ethnic or religious basis for the successful mobilisation of separate identity in those terms. Hence, and very fortunately, it can only hope to advance on more progressive terrain: via the democratic-popular or Burnsian



Martin Mayer/Network

Rifkind: Scotland's by default

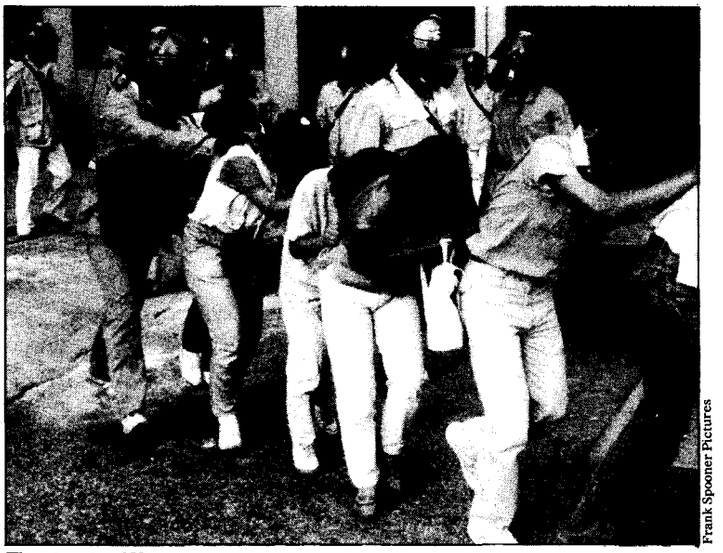
tradition, as it were, rather than through some variety of ethnic populism. But this is inherently difficult among a people ruled from outside since 1707 and lacking in modern models of successful popular self-action or revolution. The difficulty has, naturally, been compounded by the very nature of United Kingdom hegemony – that is, by a state and parliamentary inheritance whose unwritten constitution has been so heavily biased against the democratic-popular and all notion of effective sovereignty from below.

In the past, this impasse has actually been aggravated by Scottish Labour's dominance. Like some time-serving foreman queasily aware of his charges' capacity for mutinous conduct, Caledonian Labourism has always been ultra-conscientious in obeisance to all the icons of Windsordom. This must be remembered for the full and spectacular irony of the new moment to be grasped: Scotland's uncertain quest for a more modern and distinct identity has ended in the clammy embrace of the party historically most hypnotised by Britishism.

It is altered circumstances which have made the weird coupling inevitable – those very conditions of 'regressive modernisation' so admirably analysed by Stuart Hall. With Thatcher's third term we no longer have merely a government, but a régime. Britian's reborn Conservatism enjoys a traditional elective tyranny needing no reform and has built up beneath that a durable southern power-bloc which will never again cede even formal authority to the outlands or the lower orders.

It is this successful 'passive revolution' that has unwittingly given Scottish identity its new opportunity of affirmation. In the 1970s nationalism had only a floundering and half-compliant Labour government to define itself against; now, Scottish Labour's quasi-national 'mandate' has to contend with a régime and its detested personification. This basic alteration of terrain is far more significant than 'what Scottish Labour will do *now*'. The answer to that question is almost certainly that it will wriggle for years yet in vain attempts to harmonise the irreconcilable: to make a new Scottish democratic-national identity fit somehow, somewhere, into the deepening reaction of the new British hegemony. And the more significant question is whether, in the course of these struggles, the Scottish Labour Party can eventually change its own nature and become both national enough and, more importantly, democratic enough to assume the responsibility which history seems to have thrust upon it.●

Tom Nairn



Frank Spooner Pictures

The streets of Korea

The Choice Facing Chun

When 'people's power' toppled the Marcos regime in the Philippines, South Korean oppositionists predicted that Korea would be next. But in fact the comparison is not all that exact.

Marcos was a constitutionally elected leader who illicitly prolonged his rule. Chun Doo Hwan was a middle-rank general who seized power bloodily in 1980, but has since 'civilianised' himself and his regime, and has pledged to leave office on schedule next year. Marcos presided over, and indeed milked, an economy in tatters; while under Chun South Korea's 'miracle' growth has barely faltered. The Philippines had, and has, a powerful Left and an active workers movement; whereas South Korea, since the trauma of the Korean War, has hardly had a 'Left' to speak of at all.

A better comparison is Brazil. There too, spectacular economic growth under a post-military government created substantial new middle and working classes, who increasingly began to chafe at the heavy hand of the state. In South Korea's general elections of early 1985, a hastily formed opposition coalition swept all the major cities, rich and poor suburbs alike. Only the countryside, as always, dutifully voted for the powers that be.

The Brazilian parallel extends even to the concrete issue which most divides government and opposition in Seoul: the manner of presidential elections. The current system was instituted by Chun, and is indirect, based on an electoral college. The opposition claim that this will ensure that even if Chun does step down in 1988 a clone will replace him. The ruling Democratic Justice Party has indeed already picked Chun's successor, his classmate ex-general Roh Tae Woo. Roh has made slightly more liberal noises than Chun, but fears remain that the basic South Korean system – with its severe restrictions on press and trade union freedom, and persistent human rights abuses – will survive unaltered. Hence the key opposition demand for a directly-elected president.

Since the 1985 election, pressure on the government has been kept up both within and outside the national assembly. One striking development has been in the student movement, which

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has been a factor in Korean politics for a long time – student demonstrations toppled South Korea's first president in 1960. In recent years the student movement has grown in militancy and anti-Americanism. With this momentum the government has, over the past year, found it prudent to at least discuss constitutional reform. But its proposal, for a weak presidency and strong prime minister and cabinet, was unacceptable to the opposition.

Meanwhile, the death by torture in January of a student in police custody provoked huge public outcry, which has not been assuaged despite the regime's unprecedented admission of guilt (just this once) and the sacking of the chief of police and several ministers.

And then, in April, Chun took a gamble. He announced that there would be no more constitutional talks until after the Olympics, in September 1988. Next year's presidential election would be held under the old rules. The opposition, recently regrouped into the boldly named Reunification Democratic Party, announced that they would boycott such elections. And the streets have erupted, with demonstrations becoming wider and harder to contain. The churches too are increasingly in the front line of protest.

The opposition's main card now must be the Olympics, which the government desperately wants to be a global PR success. If riot police fail to re-establish control of the streets, the government faces major problems.

Essentially, Chun Doo Hwan now faces the same dilemma as did his predecessor Park Jung Hee, in the troubled year of 1979: to crack down, or to ease up? Either path carries risks, including that of his own ousting by some other general. And it could be even worse – Park was shot across a dinner table by the head of his own CIA, a relative alarmed that the president was listening too much to hard-liners. Chun is unlikely to forget that. ●

Aidan Foster-Carter

Nigel Dickenson

The money revolution leaves no small change

Cheque Out with Plastic

The mistakes banks make usually take years to become apparent. Last month was an exception. By the time Barclays Bank finally issued its Connect debit card, it had stirred up such a row among Britain's retailers that it was forced into a humiliating retreat. Sir Gordon Borrie, Director-General of the Office of Fair Trading, publicly reprimanded Barclays' negotiating tactics and, perhaps not coincidentally, the Monopolies and Mergers Commission decided to take a second look at credit card companies.

Unlike credit cards, a debit card is a cheque substitute. To the consumer Connect is a prototype for the cards we shall theoretically be using instead of cheques once the country is wired up for the cashless society. To the retailer however, that spells danger. For instead of issuing its Connect card as just another plastic card, Barclays has launched it under the international credit and debit card agency Visa, under which Barclaycard operates.

The reason for this is that when a consumer pays for his or her purchase with a cheque, the shop will typically be charged between 5p and 20p to bank the cheque. On the other hand when a consumer pays with a Visa card the store pays between 1.5% and 4% of the value of the purchase. Currently that works out at about 50p; but the beauty of a percentage fee is that a bank will automatically benefit from increased consumer spending and be insured against the effects of inflation.

So when Barclays issued its debit card under the Visa label, retailers, seeing their banking costs explode, did likewise. BP estimated that if Connect set the charging structure for the future, it would add £30m a year to the oil industry's costs or ½p to the price of a gallon of petrol.

Yet it is not only from the nation's shopkeepers that the banks have been hoping to generate extra income. Traditionally banks have made their profits by buying money cheap in the form of deposits and selling it for more in the shape of loans. The banks also run the nation's money transmission system which ensures that the 4.2 billion cheques and other payment instructions written every year actually reach their destinations. This service would not have been highlighted as a profit centre in its own right, at least not for personal customers, but for two factors.

Firstly the boom in consumer credit is putting pressure on margins. Secondly certain types of customers are demanding particular services. The wealthy are one easily identified group. And Midland Bank has just discovered another: those who are willing to pay £120 a year for the no-hassle 'Vector' account which offers an interest free overdraft of £250, additional preferential borrowing rates, no irritating bank charges and interest on current account.

This will have an impact on the rest of us. In any mass market some people pay disproportionately for the services everyone consumes. Credit card users who settle their entire balance every month enjoy interest free

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credit at the expense of the 60-70% of card holders who pay interest charges of over 23%. Personal bank customers who pay bank charges when they dip into the red or those who keep large cash balances with the bank are paying heavily for the 'free banking' the rest of us enjoy.

It is a haphazard way to price a service. Nor can it last. Tim Melville-Ross, the chief general manager of Nationwide Building Society, says 'It's a nonsense that all these vast volumes of transactions are handled for free'.

It cost the banks £2 billion in 1983, perhaps £2.3 billion today, to run the money transmission system. With such large overheads, every business is vulnerable to cherry-pickers (such as certain building societies or the new 'exclusive' banks) who woo the most profitable accounts and leave the banks with the rest.

This is the nightmare from which the banks must escape. They are spending hundreds of millions of pounds to ensure that their computer systems, designed for an undifferentiated mass market, will in future be able to easily identify different customers' needs.

This knowledge will be a quantum leap forward for the better off and backwards for the rest of us. Armed with such information the big banks will be in a position to establish which customers' accounts are profitable on the current basis of charging and which not. They could then alter their charges accordingly. It is idle to suppose they would not wish to make each market segment profitable.

The implication of this shift is that like many Americans and Europeans the average British consumer will end up paying the bank for every transaction. At this point 'free banking' will be seen for what it was – an expensive, undiscriminating marketing tool, not a social contract, although its presence probably helped end workers' legal rights to be paid in cash. ●

Peter Parker

Leading The Charge

Earlier this year American scientists in Texas announced that they had made a material that was superconducting at temperatures nearly 100 degrees above absolute zero (that's around 173 degrees centigrade below freezing).

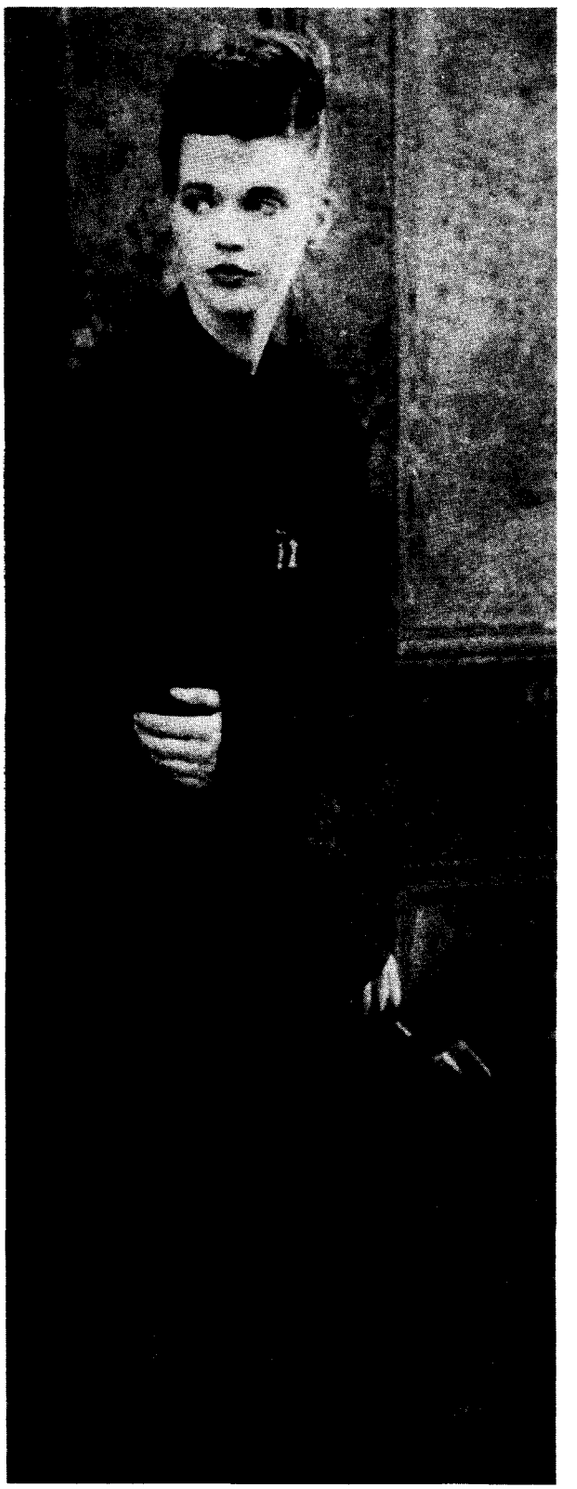
Why was this so important? Normally materials such as copper wire which conduct electricity experience an electrical resistance. They lose energy which is given out as heat. In superconducting materials, there is no resistance so no energy is lost, which in effect means that the electrical current can flow for ever.

The consequences of superconductivity are enormous. A national grid made up of superconducting cables would mean that electricity could be distributed without any loss of power. Powerful electromagnets made from superconducting materials are already used in medical equipment and scientific analysis. There are many other potential applications in computers and electronics which would revolutionise technology in the same way as the transistor and the integrated circuit did.

But there has been a big snag – until now that is. Superconductivity occurred only at very low temperatures. A material that superconducted at room temperature seemed an impossible dream.

The announcement of a material which would superconduct at only –175°C, produced a wave of euphoria among physicists. Since then virtually every solid state physicist in the Western world has rushed back into the laboratory to try and improve on the crucial 'transition' temperature. Rumours are rife and it seems likely that the discovery of a compound which is superconducting at –48°C will be announced any day: even though nobody is still quite sure why these particular materials superconduct. ●

Nina Hall



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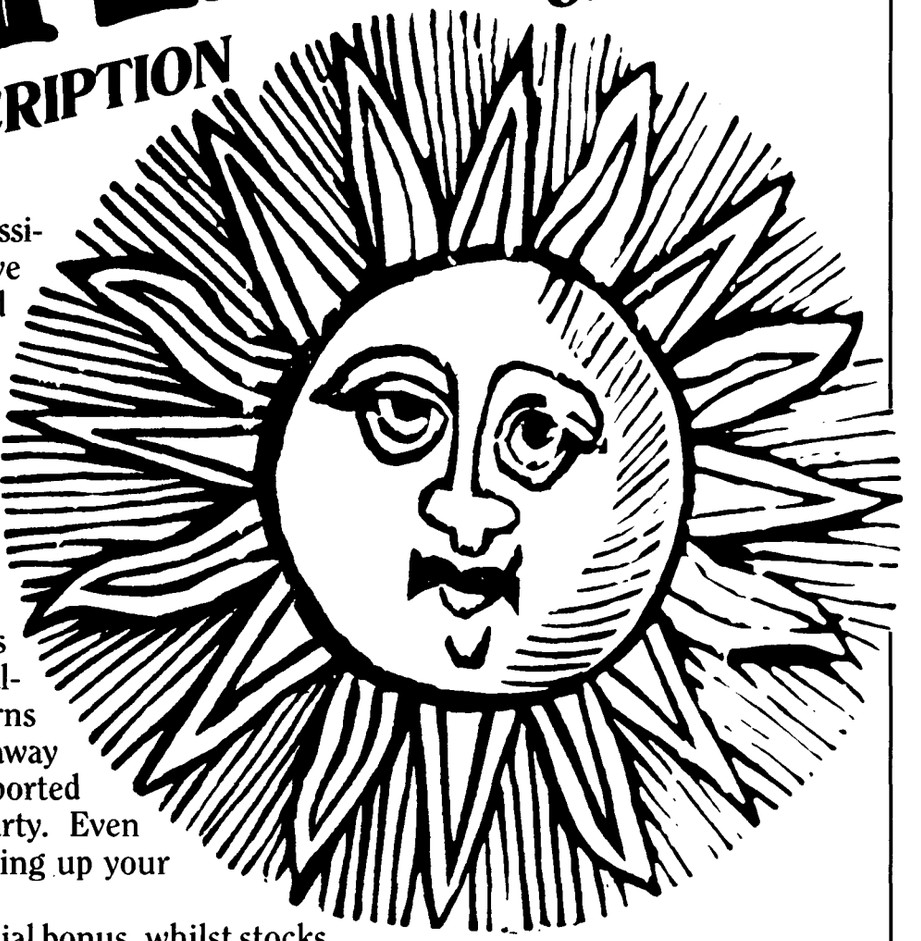

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Rough Justice

The trade union movement in Northern Ireland has always declared itself to be anti-sectarian. Belfast Trades Council was a formative presence in the civil rights movement in the 1960s, and the labour movement throughout the 1970s and 1980s has prided itself on its stand against violence and sectarianism. Many of the major unions in the North have been important in campaigns like 'Work, Peace and Progress', which comes up for endorsement at the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) this month.

But there is now a new egalitarian agenda, in Northern Ireland, as in the United States and the rest of the United Kingdom.

To become part of the new solution, however, the labour movement has to first own up that they have been part of the problem. For example, it is only since Shorts, the plane and missile makers, were bounced by the threat of losing US orders in the early 1980s if they did not do something about discrimination that things have begun to improve in the firm – flags and insignia have come off the walls and the employers have increased by a few percentage points the number of catholic apprentices. And one of Britain's biggest unions had large damages of £10,000 assessed against them by the Fair Employment Agency, for discriminating against catholics at Harland and Wolff, where the unions influence hiring and firing.

It seems that the labour movement has been imprisoned in the discourse of the British government when it comes to equality. And now, the Anglo-Irish Agreement escalates the pressure on political parties and trade unions to distance themselves from what the British government deems to be the main enemy: Sinn Fein.

The agenda began to change in Northern Ireland after it became internationalised – the impact of the hunger strikes on the Irish ex-patriot community in the United States was quickly felt when the US government came under pressure over its Shorts contract. The US labour movement argued that the contract should be contingent on reform of recruitment, the purging of sectarian propaganda, and a commitment to equality. However, instead of *using* this pressure to galvanise their own, the Northern Ireland trade union movement joined the British government in condemning their 'allies' in the Irish-American organisations. It is above all in the US that the British government's attempts to 'contain' and therefore control Northern Ireland have palpably failed.

When veteran republican and Nobel peace prize winner Sean MacBride formulated what have become known as the 'MacBride Principles' in 1984 to clean up Northern Ireland's discriminatory employment record, things began to move fast.

In themselves the principles are exactly that – they're principles of good practice; they're not sanctions, they're not laws, they're not even rules. They are akin to contract compliance – a device to use the power to purchase or to invest as a progressive, rather than a passive, power.

The republic's new leader, Charles Haughey, supports the principles. The British Labour Party's spokesperson on Ireland, Peter Archer, supports them. The Reagan government, the British government, and much of the Northern Ireland trade union movement is opposed. Curious coalitions.

Earlier this year dirty tricks were exposed when progressive Democrat Tom Hayden brought a bill endorsing the principles before California's state legislature. Although the Irish Congress of Trade Unions has yet to take a formal position on the principles, trade unionists in Ireland learned from the US that ICTU was sending a delegation to California to support the British government which was lobbying hard against MacBride. A revolt in the movement north and south of the border stopped the delegation. But that didn't stop Transport and General Workers Union official, Howard Burns, one of the labour movement's representatives on the Fair Employment Agency, from going to California.

The British government claimed the principles were illegal – the argument goes that unlike Britain's Sex Discrimination Act, Northern Ireland's anti-discrimination law (which is likely to be reformed) allows no equivalent 'positive or affirmative action'. However a New York court declared that MacBride is legal.

The British government is now changing tack, in the wake of pressure from the Republic and from the US. The defence against the principles seems to have shifted to the idea that they'd involve disinvestment in Northern Ireland. But as in the Shorts case, instead of using US pressure, many Northern Ireland unions have condemned it.

But it seems that it was this US pressure that nudged the British government to issue its own consultative document on employment, 'Equality of Opportunity in Northern Ireland'. And already it looks as if the Fair Employment Agency, which has opposed MacBride, is likely to go even further than the principles.

Certainly, the Social Democratic and Labour Party, which has also hitherto opposed MacBride, has now modernised its approach. Going beyond its own past, and the present government, it is currently arguing for targets to achieve a balanced workforce – an argument which has considerable force in a country with a 20% labour turnover. The SDLP now also favours compelling recalcitrant employers to recruit new workers from the disadvantaged community, deploying legal sanctions and imposing quotas if necessary. Not long ago this would have been heresy in the labour movement.

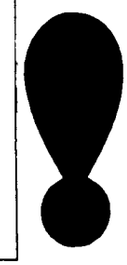
In some quarters it still is. Although the TGWU, for example, supports contract compliance, it seems to have a mental block about MacBride. 'It's just divisive', said one TGWU staffer. 'It would involve bussing in workers from one area to another.' (In fact we're talking about communities who often live across the road from each other). When I suggested that the MacBride Principles were only a form of contract compliance, the TGWU in Northern Ireland explained the nub of the problem. 'It's so inflammatory, because of where they've come from in the first place, and because people identify it very closely with the Irish Caucus (pro-republicans in the US), and because it would be seen as a way of imposing the Provisionals' demands on the workers.'

Ah, so here we have it: elements of the labour movement, proud of their anti-sectarianism, have sided with the British government for reasons which are inescapably sectarian. It couldn't distinguish between the principles and the coalition supporting them, it couldn't take the initiative itself and run with it. And it jealously scorns the coalition who did just that. What is that coalition? Irish-American republicans, the AFL-CIO, the US civil rights movement, Liberal Democrats.

Whose side did the TGWU think it was on when it went to California to support Whitehall and the Thatcher government?

MacBride signatory, NUPE's Inez McCormack, has warned that if the labour movement doesn't support justice against injustice then it makes rough justice inevitable. It seems that some of her brothers didn't heed her warning that 'we should try to manage change before change manages us'. ●

Beatrix Campbell



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THE TRANSPORT AND GENERAL WORKERS' UNION

They hit (my uncle) with the back of a gun in the face and they broke his teeth and they slit his throat. They stuck a bayonet in the neck all the way throught until they killed him. They lifted Neyri's dress and they stuck a bayonet between her legs... Neyri was moving her head and she wanted to talk to me, but she couldn't. She was dying.

Testimony of 9-year-old Raquel Requena, near Jigalpa, September 1986

This is not an isolated case. Since the United states began funding the Contras in 1981, they have killed, wounded or kidnapped nearly 17,000 Nicaraguans. Most of them were civilians; 1,778 of the 4,700 killed were children. 7,500 children have been orphaned.

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LETTERS

New Realities

Janie Glen (*MT*, June) runs directly counter to the main threads of *Marxism Today's* politics. For a decade *Marxism Today* has forced the Left to face new realities: the crisis of the labour movement; the nature of Thatcherism; the importance of new movements. But its aim has been to reshape and revitalise the Left; to broaden its appeal and outlook; to take on board new concerns; above all to weld together labour movements and social movements transforming both in the process. The strategy for hegemony has class at its heart. *Marxism Today* opposes Labourism but not Labour, for a successful hegemonic strategy requires the renewal and regeneration of both the trade union movement and the Labour Party.

Janie Glen wants to go down a different road – a libertarian cul de sac. Her late 60s rhetoric ignores the fragmentation and weakness of the new social movements in the face of the recession and Thatcherism. Her attitude to the Alliance is completely unbalanced and her belief that electoral reform will weaken party machines utterly naive. Above all her gut hostility to the Labour Party means that rather than transforming the Labour Party she wants to bury it, rather than renovating the trade union movement she wants to bypass it.

The Left faces hard times. The ideas of the rainbow coalition whether peddled by sections of the Labour Left or anti-Labour variants promoted by part of the Communist Left are a recipe for marginalisation on the political fringes. The Marxist/Gramscian Left needs to influence the main-stream of British politics. The changes in the working class demand new approaches.

Bill Morris and Bea Campbell (May issue) show how the TGWU is trying to reach part-time and service workers. John Edmonds, Tom Sawyer and Pete Carter have all been trying to break new ground. The social movements desperately need new thinking not a repetition of stale slogans. In these changing times *Marxism Today's* job is to help modernise the Left not to marginalise it.●

Jon Bloomfield, Birmingham

Soviet Women

Archie Brown (*MT*, June) mentions Gorbachev's achievement in bringing a woman into the Central Committee. Their absence from positions of power and authority was very clear to the recent British Communist Party delegation.

Our questions about women's non-representation on committees were consistently answered without any understanding of why they feel discouraged from standing for positions, or what would be necessary to change that; positive action for women has not (yet) surfaced as one of Gorbachev's changes in democratic practice.

There was some evidence of the existence of women in high places, in the Soviet trade union movement, but their presence in senior positions there is related to the sharp division of labour, with some industries or kinds of work being seen as more appropriate for women.

Things are changing, however; the discussions we had with women teachers, students, workers, and the central women's organisers in Estonia demonstrated an openness and willingness to discuss many things which had previously not been on the political agenda. This included women's perceptions of their own experience; services which make the domestic burden easier; and the determination not to allow male comrades to wriggle out of their responsibilities.

External factors as well as internal pressures will combine to force some issues. It was from the health care personnel in Estonia that we heard professional recognition (in the face of concern about AIDS) of the existence of homosexuality, drug abuse, prostitution, and the need for confidentiality and hence protection in providing care.

Gorbachev's end of term report? He is trying hard to deal with past failings, but has a long way to go. He is hampered by the lack of a feminist ideological underpinning, which will take time to develop, and which if he is prepared to learn from unconventional (for the Soviet Union) sources, can be speeded up. But if he listens to women and the women's organisations, and if he persists, significant progress can be made quickly.●

Vicky Seddon, Sheffield

Grabbing the Nettle

Angela McRobbie (*MT*, May) certainly hit home. It's all true. As a mother of four small children I am worried. The liberal bandwagon, which started rolling with the de-schoolers and free schoolers and the radicals of the 60s, appears to be still rumbling forward with little heed for the way that the majority of parents feel. No wonder the Right is cashing in on parental anxieties. The Left appears unable to harness parents' yearning for a disciplined structured environment where their children can be instructed.

Around my kitchen table I hear parents who have a lifetime's commitment to the Left seriously talking about private schooling.

The Left must grasp the nettle, and the most difficult one is discipline. Parents with children at secondary school realise that in the vacuum created by well meaning leftist idealists, reactionary attitudes of the most repellent kind creep in to fill the space. Parents do want a calm controlled environment for their children to learn in. An ambience where the loudmouths and the racists and the bullies can be slapped down or excluded.

The Left could pre-empt the Right by allowing parents' voices to be heard and by encouraging an energetic consumerism in the education sector. Most parents do support their children's teachers. And they deplore low wages and poor school conditions. But they are not willing to swallow this double handicap as the whole reason why schools are failing their children. ●

Anne Garvey, Cambridge

Parental Lessons

It may or may not be true that within the current debate about education, 'it is difficult to find any body within the Left which is willing to give an ear to issues on which many parents feel acutely', (*MT*, May) but what is definite is that Angela McRobbie has little to suggest about advancing the debate. She calls for the Left to listen. To whom? To this great majority of parents who 'want their children to be stretched, pushed and stimulated'? I don't believe this is what the great majority of parents do want, and have we really sunk into accepting this is all schooling is about?

McRobbie ignores the ideological stranglehold that the Tories have established over education. They have made the long since discredited Black Papers respectable because the Left allowed them to do so, by accepting wrongly that standards have fallen. Thus the debate about education centres on the ways in which standards might be improved. Any idea that education might be about something other than becoming literate or numerate has vanished. Faced with the lack of an assault upon the Tories' pernicious lies about standards and of an alternative vision of education, parents also have increasingly focused on standards. Parents need to be offered an alternative. As the truancy rate continues to rise it is clear that children are demanding it, implicitly at least.●

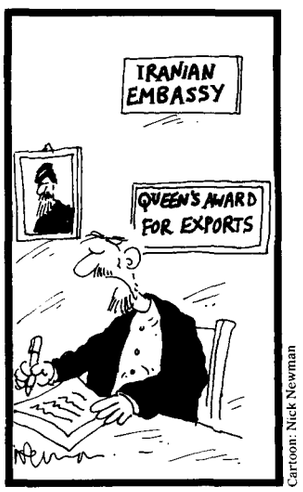
John Shotton, Lutterworth

Macho Unions

Bea Campbell's description (*MT*, May) of changes taking place in the T&G includes the attitudes of almost every man and his dog but neglects any discussion of the influence which active women are having.

Women have been working within the T&G for a long time to put themselves, on the union's agenda. Bea falls into the trap of studying trade unionists from a dated position. We have moved a long way in the T&G and within the perimeters of our policy will continue to organise ourselves to meet the needs and encourage involvement of all of our members. ●

Margaret Prosser, London



Cartoon: Nick Newman

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Crawling From The Wreckage

When the dust settled, 1987 looked disturbingly like 1983. And this time there were no alibis. **Andrew Gamble** assesses the outcome

The cold wind of Thatcherism still blows. For a time the election campaign raised hopes that change might be coming. Even the Tories feared it – just how much the Tory papers have been revealing since the election. But in the end the 1987 election broadly reproduced the results of 1983. The Conservatives polled almost exactly the same percentage of the vote. Labour rose 3%, the Alliance declined 3%. A very small number of seats changed hands. The essential message was no change. The electoral map was largely frozen and the regional divisions so evident in 1983 were further enhanced.

The gap between Labour and the Conservatives in percentage terms has been trimmed but still stands at eleven points. This is the highest margin any party has enjoyed since 1935, apart from 1983. Labour will still need an exceptional swing next time to win outright. The hopes it had of moving halfway towards its target were not realised.

The failure is greatest in the south of England and the Midlands. Labour achieved much higher swings in the north of England and Scotland. Labour leads the Conservatives by 18% in Scotland, 16% in Wales, 5% in the north, but trails by 15% in the Midlands, and 25% in the South. The bulk of the seats are now in the Midlands and the south of England, but Labour made little headway in rebuilding its support. Instead it lost seats. For most of southern England the Alliance remains the main challenger to the Conservatives. The contrast in electoral behaviour of different regions has never been sharper. In the South East the Conservatives won 125 seats and Labour 2. In Scotland Labour won 50 seats and the Conservatives 10. Yet 30 years ago when the Conservatives also had a Westminster majority they had a majority of the Scottish seats and over 50% of the Scottish vote.

Labour's minimum target in this election was 250 seats and 35/36% of the vote. This would in national terms have got them back almost to where they were when they lost in 1979 – hardly a great triumph, but it would have provided a springboard for outright victory at the next election. If they had achieved it the story of the election would have been Labour's resurgence, not Thatcher's confirmation. The success of the Labour campaign and the ineptitude of the Conservatives appeared to make that a possibility. But it all looked very different when the results began to come in and the absence of any significant shift became apparent.

The minimum Alliance target in this election was 30 seats and 30% of the vote. They also hoped to overtake Labour in votes if not in seats. These objectives were not realised. The Alliance did not collapse, but it suffered a significant setback. It never came close to making the breakthrough in the south of England against the Conservatives that the 1983 results had shown might be a possibility.

For both opposition parties the election has made necessary a fundamental reassessment of their political strategy, their attitudes to one another, and a sober calculation of what is going to be necessary to defeat the Conservatives.

The Conservatives did not win because of their campaign but in spite of it. They did not win because they had assembled a popular majority. They did not win as a party of the whole country. Little is left of the strategy of the old Unionist party as the Conservatives preferred to be called when the maintenance of the British Empire was the cornerstone of Conservative politics. Only the ritual invocations of British 'greatness' and the attachment to Britain having its own nuclear deterrent recall it.

There are four main reasons for the electoral success of the Conservatives. The opposition in parliament was split; the opposition outside parliament had suffered repeated defeats; the government's record, particularly its handling of the economy, was strong; and the social determinants of electoral choice increasingly favour the Conservatives. Each needs considering in turn.

The fact that the opposition in parliament was split hardly needs reiteration. In percentage terms the Conservatives' electoral position is not particularly strong. They are very vulnerable to quite small shifts in support, hence the panic at Conservative Central Office on June 4 when their private polls as well as some of the national polls indicated that Labour could conceivably close the gap by polling day and deprive the Tories of their overall majority.

What makes the Conservative position much stronger than it appears is not their absolute percentage, but the fact that the opposition to them is so evenly divided between two opposition parties. This is further underlined by the Alliance being the main challenger in the South, and Labour in the North. The failure of either opposition party in this election or the last to emerge as the undisputed challenger to the government in all regions of the country has ensured that the Conservatives can win elections with only 42% of the vote. If this pattern persists there is nothing to

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stop the Conservatives continuing to win, even while their vote continues to decline. The concentration of their support and the split in their opponents has for the moment transformed the British political system into a dominant party system. The old two-party system as well as the multi-party system which threatened for a time in the 1970s to supersede it have disappeared.

Compare 1959 with 1987. Labour had suffered its third election defeat and many observers were prepared to speculate that Labour would never win again, because of the way social trends were moving against it and recruiting new support for the Conservatives. But Labour in 1959 still had 258 MPs and 43.8% of the vote, only six points behind the Conservatives. This was still very much a two-party system, in the sense that although the Liberals had 16.9% of the vote in 1959, Labour was still in a position to challenge the Conservatives as an alternative government.

The situation today is different. Like the interwar period the Conservatives have a dominant position because of the way in which the opposition to them is divided. So long as the opposition remains divided and so long as the Conservatives can maintain their support above 40% of the electorate they will continue to rule.

The second point is the fact that the opposition outside parliament had suffered repeated defeats. Elections are rarely decided by the short three week campaign itself. At least 60% of the electorate have decided how to vote before the election campaign begins. In retrospect Labour had a hopeless task. It lost the election because it had not won sufficient support in the years before it. Although the polls often showed Labour in the lead, particularly during 1986, the lead was never commanding. Even when the government was most unpopular Labour failed to lift its support above 40%. There was hardly any room to allow for the inevitable recovery of the government vote as the election approached. The successful election campaign could not overcome the failure to establish a clear ascendancy in the previous four years.

Labour suffered in the last parliament because the government succeeded in breaking most of the extra-parliamentary opposition to its policies, and did so in ways which enabled it to retain the initiative in the political argument and to solidify its electoral base. In the major class struggles that took place, and above all in the miners' strike, the government won. At no point was its authority seriously impaired. Its victories over the labour movement were used to further discredit and undermine trade unionism, and to weaken the standing of the Labour Party with its own supporters and the wider electorate.

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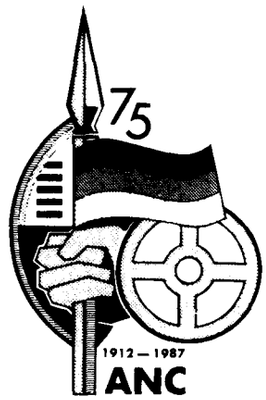

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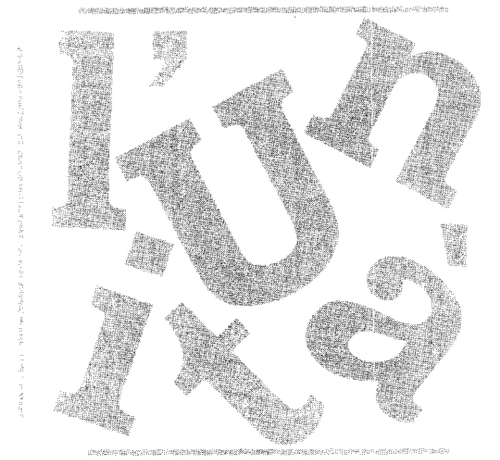

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'The Conservatives have weakened Labour's most solid block of supporters, council house tenants'

A similar effect can be seen in the onslaught that the government launched on that other institutional stronghold of the labour movement – the urban local authorities. Despite the propaganda successes of the campaign against abolition of the GLC, the government succeeded in sweeping away the metropolitan tier of local government, and in dividing and defeating the councils that defied its spending curbs. Aided by its allies in Fleet Street the government was also highly successful in vilifying local councils, particularly in London, for aspects of their policies in relation to education, gay and lesbian rights, and anti-racism. The government had some success in transferring the blame for the problems of inner city areas from themselves to Labour councils; this has damaged Labour in particular areas, especially London.

Thirdly, the government's record is strong. This may not sound very likely when you think of all the muddles and fiascos of the last four years. Certainly there were plenty of those – from GCHQ and Westland to the Libyan bombing and the Wright secrets case. But dramatic though several of these events were, they had little long-term impact. They were quickly forgotten.

The Thatcher government has created enormous resentment and hostility among certain groups. But it is easy to be blinded by this and overlook the calculated interest politics by which the government has maintained a solid bloc of support. Most important here is the economic recovery itself. The base for this is fragile, its future uncertain, but its reality for the economy of the South and the Midlands is undeniable. To have presided over six years of economic improvement without a major crisis has given the government a considerable asset, one it was not slow to exploit during the election.

The economic recovery is the backdrop against which other government policies are displayed. Inflation has not been reduced any further since 1983, but neither has it risen. The level of unemployment has been contained. Profitability has continued to recover and international business confidence in the British economy is high again. The government has pushed through a large privatisation programme which together with the proceeds from North Sea oil have eased the government's problems in funding what remain very high levels of public spending. The threat of a fiscal crisis which loomed in 1983 has not materialised. The government has been able instead to fund both pre-election tax cuts and a substantial increase in spending programmes on education and health last autumn.

The government's economic record was not easy for the opposition parties to attack. Doctrinaire monetarism has been abandoned. The government has become pragmatic in its management of the economy. Its overriding objective has been to keep living standards rising for those in employment. It professes unconcern about the level of private sector pay deals, and has become adept at juggling its monetary and fiscal policies to keep both the financial markets and the electors content. The result is that there are large numbers of people who have a direct stake in the prosperity continuing and a reason to associate that prosperity with the Conservative government.

Voting Trends

	1979		1983		1987	
	Seats	Votes %	Seats	Votes %	Seats	Votes %
Conservative	339	43.9	397	42.4	375	42.3
Labour	269	36.9	209	27.6	229	30.8
Lib/SDP	11	13.8	23	25.4	22	22.6

Finally, social trends increasingly favour the Conservatives. This goes hand in hand with the economic performance. It is not a new explanation. The Conservatives have been talking about a property-owning democracy since 1947. They have always understood the use of state power to entrench social trends which they recognise as favourable to the creation of a bloc of Conservative interests. Rising affluence by itself does not make people Conservative, but channelling that rising affluence in ways which lead people to identify themselves with the Conservatives and against Labour can have a significant effect. That is why the Conservatives were so enthusiastic in the 1950s about the expansion of home ownership and introduced the tax concessions to facilitate it, and why in the 1980s they have pursued with such vigour the sale of council houses, a policy first introduced by Edward Heath.

There can be no doubt that this policy has been a masterstroke for the government. It has made a significant inroad into the traditional Labour vote. There is nothing specifically Conservative about the policy. It was advocated within the Labour government in the 1970s but never adopted. By seizing it for their own the Conservatives have weakened Labour's most solid bloc of supporters, council house tenants. They have accompanied this with the policies of encouraging wider share ownership and have sought to identify this too with voting Conservative.

These moves have taken place against a background of a steep decline in manufacturing industry. The trade unions have lost members through mass unemployment and the disappearance of so many firms in the traditional manufacturing sectors. The weakening of trade unions has been accelerated by the government's trade union legislation which has placed important legal curbs on the effectiveness of trade union action. The government wishes to see an economy which is either union-free or which has unions organised as company rather than national unions. This is becoming true in many parts of the private sector. As the salience of trade unions diminishes so Labour voting and a Labour identity becomes harder to sustain.

There is still a substantial public sector, whose workers remain more loyal to Labour as the party most committed to high public spending. The Conservatives have failed as yet to make many inroads here. But Labour could not hope to be elected on the votes of public sector workers alone, and there is no guarantee of the permanence of this support, given the plans the Conservatives have announced for transforming education, health, and housing in the new parliament.

The Alliance fared worst in the election, losing both votes and seats. It now faces a period of reorganisation in which the unification of the two parties under one leader seems inevitable. The SDP has been reduced to 5 MPs while the Liberals have 17. The Liberals also have three times as many members. It seems likely therefore that it will be a merger on the Liberals' terms, and that it will be a Liberal who is chosen to lead the new party. The party will not fight another election campaign with two leaders..

Given the Alliance's disappointment in this campaign some scapegoat must be found, and the two-headed leadership is the obvious one. It is being widely blamed for the Alliance setback. But it distracts attention from the real issue. If the Alliance had succeeded in wresting second place from the Labour Party, the two-headed leadership would probably have been judged a great success. When parties do badly they blame their campaigns or their leaders. But the reasons they do badly are usually quite different and more fundamental.

The problem for the Alliance is that to have a chance of breaking through it needs the other two parties to continue to advertise their extremism. Against a Conservative Party mobilising a high proportion of those who have done well from its policies in the last six years, and a Labour Party fighting an effective campaign on traditional distribu-

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'Owen seemed to jump at the opportunity to continue the old internal Labour feud'

tion issues such as jobs, health and education, the Alliance had no room to be distinctive and no chance to benefit from the collapse of the vote of one of the other parties.

Their task was not aided by confusion over their main target. They did not seem to have decided whether their primary objective should be to replace Labour as the main party of opposition, or whether it should be to achieve a balanced parliament, in which the Alliance would negotiate with the largest single party the terms of its support. The first indicated an all-out onslaught on Labour, the second on both parties, but principally on the Conservatives.

Here the differences between the two leaders *were* exposed. David Steel clearly positioned himself left-of-centre throughout the campaign. No one could accuse David Owen of doing that. In one poll Tory voters named him as their third most popular politician after Margaret Thatcher and Norman Tebbit. The relish with which he attacked Labour on its defence policy was undisguised. He seemed to jump at the opportunity to continue the old internal Labour feud.

The election has not knocked out the Alliance. It demonstrates once again the existence of this solid block of centre opinion in the electorate, still denied proper representation in parliament. But the chances of making a decisive breakthrough do not now seem to have been greatly enhanced by the alliance with the SDP. The SDP has failed to replace Labour or to bring about the major realignment of left-of-centre opinion which its founders hoped. It has brought some new support to the Liberals but not enough.

Nevertheless the Alliance remains in contention. If the government's handling of the economy were ever seriously to falter, or if Labour were to plunge again into internal feuding, the Alliance is poised to take off again. But 1987 showed that while its appeal remains so diffuse and its interest base so unclear its vote can still be squeezed by the two main parties.

Labour also faces a period of painful re-assessment. The election has staved off the worst. The party is still alive. If there had been a further fall in the Labour vote, and the Alliance had taken second place, Labour might possibly have gone into a terminal decline. The party has avoided that. It has reasserted itself as the main alternative to the Conservatives.

One of the main contributors to this success was the campaign Labour fought. In retrospect the campaign did little to dent the Conservatives. Every single national poll taken during the campaign put the Tories above 40%. But it did maximise Labour's vote in its heartlands, it strengthened Neil Kinnock's position as leader, and it prevented the Alliance surging at Labour's expense.

These are important results, but they are hardly enough. Labour appears to have achieved a marked shift in its favour among young people and particularly women; it remains weak among the old and trails the Conservatives among C2 skilled workers by an even greater margin than in 1983. (Ivor Crewe, *The Guardian* 16/6/87). Even among trade unionists its lead, though better than in 1983, is far from overwhelming.

What is most disturbing for Labour is its continuing failure to re-establish itself in the prosperous southern economy. Doing well in its heartlands does not seem to help Labour extend its appeal to other parts of the country. Labour makes a strong traditional class appeal to communities in the old industrial heartlands who feel locked out of the prosperity of the Thatcher boom. The strength of the Labour vote in areas like Liverpool and the North East depends upon solidaristic class loyalties and a clear perception by the working class electorate of the class war that the Thatcher government is waging against them.

These areas however are no longer numerous enough to return a Labour government. They are the periphery which is being sacrificed in the great restructuring of the British economy over which the Thatcher government has presided. The new core areas of the British economy have been established on quite different community and occupational patterns. The increasing bifurcation of labour markets into core and peripheral workers is permitting the creation of a solid bloc of workers who identify themselves politically far more readily with the Conservatives than they do with Labour.

The old Labourist alliance between the trade unions and the progressive middle class which triumphed in 1945 and 1964/6 cannot be resuscitated. A new kind of electoral coalition has to be assembled, if Labour is not to remain in permanent opposition.

What kind of coalition is feasible? Under the existing electoral system the forces propelling Labour to be a broad party of reform with little distinctive socialist content to its policies are likely to prove irresistible. This would involve placing the extension of individual citizenship rights at the heart of Labour's appeal, endorsing many of the changes over which the Thatcher government has presided, and further weakening what remains of Labour's collectivism in economic policy.

There seems little doubt that this is the direction in which Labour will move if it seeks to win back support in the South. It has to find a modern appeal and reconnect itself with the interests and aspirations of the workers it has lost. The rival strategies offered by the London and the Liverpool parties would maximise Labour's appeal as a regional class party and as a party of minorities, but at the expense of rebuilding Labour's mass electoral appeal. Labour could of course choose to become such a party but would no longer remain a contender for government.

A Labour Party which seeks to maintain itself as an alternative government may also be forced to reconsider its attitude towards the Alliance. Without an electoral pact between the anti-Conservative forces in British politics, it may prove impossible to defeat Conservatism. But an electoral pact is only likely to work if there is a commitment to electoral and constitutional reform. At present it is sections of the Left rather than the Right of the Labour Party which support such reforms because they would extend democracy and might make possible the emergence of a radical socialist party. The Labour Party leadership still believes it can achieve exclusive power.

The scale of the task facing Labour in England can be seen by looking at Labour in Scotland. Labour's success there is because Labour is a more plausible representative of a Scottish national interest than the Conservatives, who are increasingly perceived as an alien intrusion. The collapse of unionism as a factor in United Kingdom politics has enabled the Scots to define their interest against that of England. Class and nation go hand in hand.

Labour's problem in England is that it has always struggled to make itself legitimate in terms of the dominant culture and its institutions. Labour politicians have difficulty in being accepted as exponents and guardians of the national culture, which is deeply Tory in its assumptions and values. Labour succeeded by organising a counter-culture of its own, based on class, trade union solidarity, and the institutions and communities of the labour movement. These have received an unprecedented battering in the last 10 years. Thatcher has been determined to weaken and if possible destroy the institutions and traditions of the labour movement in Britain, because it is this that has sustained real opposition to the dominant social and economic order.

In their reflections on the election, leader writers and commentators in the Conservative press when they were not expressing satisfaction at the final demise of socialism and congratulating the electorate on its 'maturity' occasionally expressed concern at two results of the election: firstly that the country's political divisions had been enhanced by the result; and secondly that there was so little prospect of any party replacing the Conservatives in government. A healthy democracy it is argued needs the alternation of parties in office (provided of course they are on the right kind).

The idea however that there is some mysterious pendulum which will even-

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tually restore the Left to power is false. Permanent one-party rule is not only possible – it has been a fact in both Italy and Japan during the last 40 years. The British Conservatives have achieved partly through good fortune, partly through political skill of a high order, a strong if not impregnable position in British politics. 1987 shows that there is no electoral force that can yet topple them, and during the last eight years they have vanquished all challenges to their authority.

Yet the vulnerability of the Conservatives' record on social policy issues was clearly exposed during the election campaign. On health for example the Conservatives were forced to compete on Labour's ground and try to outbid them by claiming they were spending more than Labour had ever done.

The theme of freedom and fairness made some big dents in the Conservatives' claims to moral superiority. A sure sign of how much Labour had panicked their opponents was the way the Conservatives switched their appeal in the last few days of the campaign to the oldest and most basic Tory appeal of all – what are Labour's tax plans going to cost you? You're doing well under the Conservatives; don't let Labour wreck it.

There are reefs ahead for the government. It will face a number of major tests in the new parliament – on Scotland, on the implementation of their 'radical' programme, and on the economy. On Scotland the pressure for a national assembly is likely to become intense. The longer the Conservative government delays in grasping this problem, the more intractable it is likely to become. The government is already having to administer one part of the United Kingdom without the consent of its communities. If it does not meet Scottish requests for devolution of power from Westminster, the estrangement of Scotland from the United Kingdom could deepen markedly.

The 'radical' programme outlined in the manifesto looks like a recipe for considerable chaos and turbulence if it is implemented. The proposals are not genuinely radical – they seem more designed to complete the process of removing power and funds from local authorities and creating new wedges of voters who have a direct interest in voting Conservative. A considerable extension of central power is in prospect. The government hopes to destroy the labour movement's power base in the town halls. There are to be no more experiments in local socialism.

Finally there is the economy. How will the Thatcher government react should the world once again plunge into recession? Since 1981 the government has not had to face this problem. Its authority and its credibility have stayed intact. It has continued to deliver prosperity to the South. If the prosperity should crack, how will the government respond? If unemployment were to move up sharply or inflation accelerate as a result of changes in the world economy, the government might find its reputation for sound economic management in tatters. That could be the trigger for a big shift of support away from the Conservatives which they would find difficult to recover.

'Without an electoral pact between the anti-Conservative forces it may prove impossible to defeat Conservatism'

The future of the world economy is very difficult to predict. But the extent of financial imbalances and the management of the American economy under Reagan has created an explosive situation. The Thatcher government may be unable to sustain for much longer the steady progress of the British economy towards greater prosperity and lower unemployment. The proceeds from privatisation and oil will continue to help subsidise the political costs of maintaining the Conservatives' electoral bloc, and paying for the unemployed and the security budget. But they will not be enough to cushion the Conservatives from the political unpopularity that will come if the economy turns down.

Economic troubles will not automatically produce socialism however. The Conservatives have built a very strong position and intend to go on strengthening it. They can be defeated. But the opposition parties have a great deal to do. The 1987 election revealed just how much. ●

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Heartlands Of Defeat

The election results indicated a deepening of the rift between North and South. **Doreen Massey** analyses the complexities of the political map

The election of 1983 was not an aberration. The patterns that were evident then are stronger now. What happened in this election, fundamentally, was that Labour strengthened its position in its traditional bases, but failed to break out of them. The Conservatives also consolidated their hold where they were already strong. The difference is that they have power, and they have a strategy for attacking Labour's citadels, especially in the inner cities. Labour is out of power, and as yet has no strategy for addressing those elements of Thatcherland – the bulk of the working class in the towns of the outer South East for instance – which we should have on our side.

That Labour further strengthened its position within its traditional strongholds can be seen, first, by looking at social patterns of voting. In all the groups where Labour was already the strongest party, it consolidated its position even more. Such groups are Labour's social base: semi-skilled and unskilled workers, council tenants, the unemployed, northern men, and trade unionists (see Table 1). In all of these groups the party achieved increases in its share of the vote way above the national average. There *are* some new additions over the picture in 1983, and interestingly they are all among women. Among women aged 18-24, among women in the north of Great Britain, and women trade unionists, Labour was not the strongest party in 1983. In 1987 it is.

A similar picture emerges if we look at groups where Labour did relatively well in 1983, getting 2% more than its national share. As well as the groups already mentioned, this category includes all men, skilled workers, the relatively young, and midlands men (see Table 1). In most of these groups too, Labour did better than average in this election. Interestingly, *all* of the groups where this was *not* true were male.

In these social strongholds, Labour strengthened its position more among women than among men, though women had started from a less strong position. What this means is, and this seems to be true overall, that the gender gap is closing. So there has been a strengthening of the 1983 base especially by drawing in more women.

But the base has not been extended. There are *no* new groups, in 1987, showing ahead of the national average by more than 2%. A number of groups did increase their vote for Labour considerably more than the national average. These were women (up 6%), women in the age group 25-34 (up 8%, while the male vote in that age group went down slightly), women between 55 and 64 (up 6%) and over 65 (8%), men over 65 (5%), and therefore pensioners as a group (up 6%), and working class home-owners (up 7%). But none of these groups shot way ahead of Labour's national average.

If we look in more detail *within* social groups, a similar pattern emerges. In the middle class (Table 2), Labour is the weakest party in every group. The Tories have an enormous lead not only among private-sector but also among public-sector middle-class voters. Labour's highest share is among the university-educated group and it was here that it increased its vote. In total contrast, the *Guardian* also reported a poll of the 'self-made' middle class, those who have received no form of further education. They voted Tory by a massive 74% as did the majority (57%) of those with some form of further education, but short of a degree. It gives another slant to cuts in higher education.

Finally, and most importantly, look at the working class. Here Labour's vote did strengthen solidly amongst working class council tenants *and* working class owner-occupiers (see Table 1). Indeed all the polls show the Tory lead being cut back quite sharply among this latter group. So there are some signs of movement. Labour increased its vote only slightly among the growing white-collar clerical group. It achieved an average increase among the (declining) group of skilled workers, though the Conservatives are still the most popular party with this group. It was among unskilled and semi-skilled workers, slightly expanded as a proportion of the electorate since 1983, and where Labour was already strongest, that it achieved its biggest increase.

Basically, however you look at it, Labour did best this time where it was already strong. It improved its position on 1983. But there are important reservations. First, this improvement since 1983 has often not been enough to reverse the longer-term trend away from Labour in these bases. Labour's share even of semi-skilled and unskilled voters is still lower than in 1974 (though that was before the SDP). Second, many of the groups in which Labour consolidated its position this time are declining as a proportion of the electorate.

But looking at national figures is not enough. Since the 50s there has been a growth of local variation in voting patterns in Great Britain, with the Conservatives doing particularly well in the South and in rural areas, and Labour in the North and in urban areas. There has been a growing polarisation both between regions and between urban and rural areas. This time again, these old geographical divides have been further consolidated.

In general, both Labour and Conservatives did best where they were already strongest (see Map 2). Indeed the Tories actually *gained* in some southern regions – something which did not happen in 1983. So at a regional level the political polarisation of Great Britain has been increased. Hardly had a few results come in before the North – South divide became a central theme of political comment. Some of that commentary was belied by the numbers. In particular, the success in Scotland seems to have been overplayed. It is in the North of England, not Scotland, that Labour has its highest share of the vote. And it was in Wales, not Scotland, that Labour's share increased most. What *was* spectacular in Scotland was the loss by the Tories. Yet even here we must not get carried away by what the papers say. Looked at soberly, in the cold light of subsequent days, the Tory vote in Scotland is still higher (and that in spite of there being four parties), than the Labour vote in East Anglia, the South East and the South West.

Indeed, at this other end of the country Labour failed to win in any of the towns of the outer South East, and in particular the new and expanding towns, which it had targeted. These are manufacturing towns. Some of them have a higher percentage of manufacturing in their employment now than

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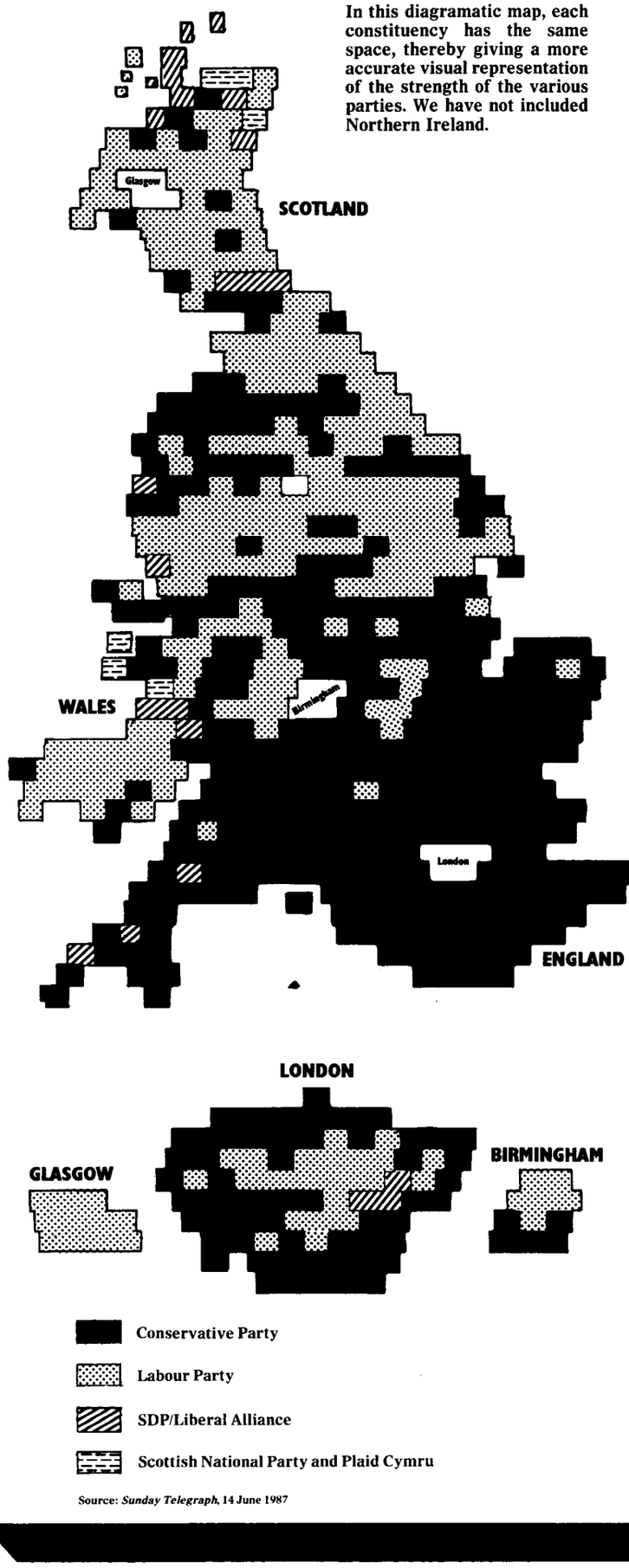
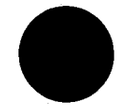
Map 1 General Election, 11 June 1987



Source: *Sunday Telegraph*, 14 June 1987

'Labour is regaining its strengths in its traditional regions but failing to build bases outside'



many an industrially-devastated town of the North. Basildon, Stevenage, Harlow – all of them are more manufacturing-based today than is Sheffield. Many of these towns also have high unemployment rates. Yet Labour won none of them. In most of them there has been a swing *to* the Conservatives. However the picture for Labour was not appalling. The swings to the Tories were mainly from the Alliance (mainly SDP), not Labour, and in almost all cases Labour did increase its share of the vote. Labour also holds a good number of the local authorities of these towns. Yet it failed to win the constituencies.

So the overall picture still holds: of Labour regaining its strengths in its traditional regions but failing to build bases outside; of the Tories, even in a year when their overall share went down slightly, gaining in the South. The Alliance lost everywhere, although in relation to 1983, Liberal candidates outperformed SDP candidates in all regions save East Anglia and the South East.

The Midlands remain a battleground. The West Midlands was a triumph for Thatcher in 1979, when she captured a significant share of the votes of skilled male trade unionists in the region. In 1987 she failed to advance much on that, but neither did Labour re-establish itself. The Tories are well ahead in a manufacturing region with a strong base of skilled workers and which has been devastated by de-industrialisation. The East Midlands are more a mixture of north and south, and have been a clear target of Thatcherism, with fast-rising home-ownership, an economy which in parts shows signs of prosperity, and of course the effects of the miners' strike. The Tories were already stronger here than to the west, and they increased their vote further this time. The political divide between north and south is shifting north.

But it is not just regional polarisation between north and south that is deepening, but also between urban industrial areas and more rural parts of the country. There are pockets of the North – particularly the North West – which Labour has not captured. But the Tories now have *no* seats in the major urban areas of Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, Newcastle, Bradford and Leicester, only one in Sheffield, and two in each of Leeds and Edinburgh. And in all these places Labour did well. In Liverpool its performance was spectacular. Within the city, Labour's lowest increase in share was over 7% (Riverside) and its highest was over 13% (Mossley Hill). David Alton's Liberal majority was slashed, Terry Fields doubled his, Eric Heffer soared ahead. Even in the wider conurbation the picture was the same. Cammel Laird worker Lol Duffy ran Linda Chalker a very close second in Wallasey. As Fazey commented in the

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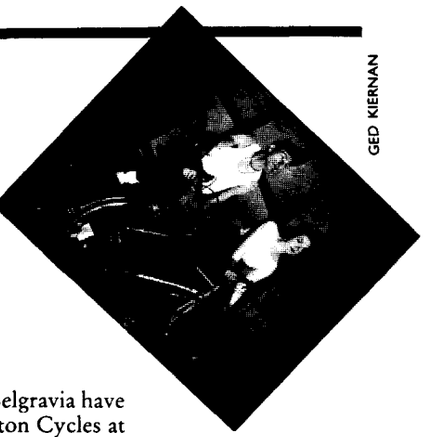

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Financial Times, 'Merseyside as a whole shifted emphatically leftwards, even in the Wirral'.

The consolidation of this geographical concentration of party support can also be seen by looking at seats where there is a majority of over 20,000. Labour and Conservatives have 28 of these each. In Labour's group the swing to Labour was in every case massive. It was also in all but two cases at the expense of the Alliance; indeed much of Labour's greater strength in 1987 in its traditional groups and areas has come from the Alliance not the Tories. In this case the exceptions were Ogmore (a swing from Plaid Cymru) and all the Liverpool seats, where all the gains were from the Tories. In the Tory seats with a majority over 20,000 the swings were far lower and much more mixed.

Finally, both Labour and Conservative have 46 seats where they hold more than 60% of the vote. In all but three of Labour's 46 its share continued to rise even more than, and often massively more than its national average increase of 4%. The three exceptions were in Birmingham (Small Heath and Sparkbrook) and Manchester Central. In the Tory group of 46 there was a less spectacular concentration but in only seven did their share slip more than their national fall of 1%.

This kind of concentration of votes into particular regions has a whole series of effects for Labour. It means that Labour voters are underrepresented in terms of seats. The government is finding it hard to staff its Scottish and Welsh offices. There is dark talk from Scotland of 'Doomsday Scenarios' and the constant question, 'do the Conservatives have the moral authority to govern Scotland'. Most positively, this geographical concentration has been an important condition for the local solidarisms, traditions, and kinds of strength, which are invaluable; which are the basis of a lot of what the labour movement has been built on.

One worrying effect of the geographical polarisation, however, is the real threat now of a divide between North and South within the Labour Party. The newspapers all dwelt on 'the London effect', and blamed it on what they have chosen to call the 'loony Left'. There have been lurid accounts of plans within the party to neuter the so-called London effect, and to crush the hard Left.

So 'left' is conflated within London, all are branded loony, and the hunt is on. Let us hope that none of this is true. Such divisions are right now being used by Margaret Thatcher in launching her attack on local councils and inner cities everywhere.

We should look at these arguments carefully. First, the Left in general, especially individual candidates, did rather well. There is no evidence here for saying that radicalism (or 'extremism') lost Labour the election. But second, is there a London effect and if so what is it? The Greater London area *did* provide the Tories with their biggest increase in share of the vote, higher than any other region (see Map 2). Yet London was *not* the region where Labour did worst. The party performed even less well in all the regions of the south, all the regions surrounding the metropolis.

Nevertheless, the London performance was not good. But the swings in different parts of the city were extremely varied, and there are clearly very different social processes going on beneath them. First there is the group of constituencies afflicted by the invasion of yuppies ... Fulham, Battersea and Putney (now called West and South Chelsea by estate agents), Bow and Poplar and Newham South with the influx of bright young things into Docklands, and even Hackney, so conveniently close to the City. All these areas have seen recent rapid increases in professional-managerial groups, helped on by the local council in Wandsworth which has sold off council estates to developers. This is a different kind of population shift from the gentrification of, say, Islington in the 70s. In the 70s it was much more likely to be public-sector professionals, today they are from the private sector – finance and services above all. And as we have already seen the private-sector middle-class is far more likely to vote Tory.

'The political divide between North and South is shifting north'

So that is one group of London constituencies. Other factors are in play elsewhere.

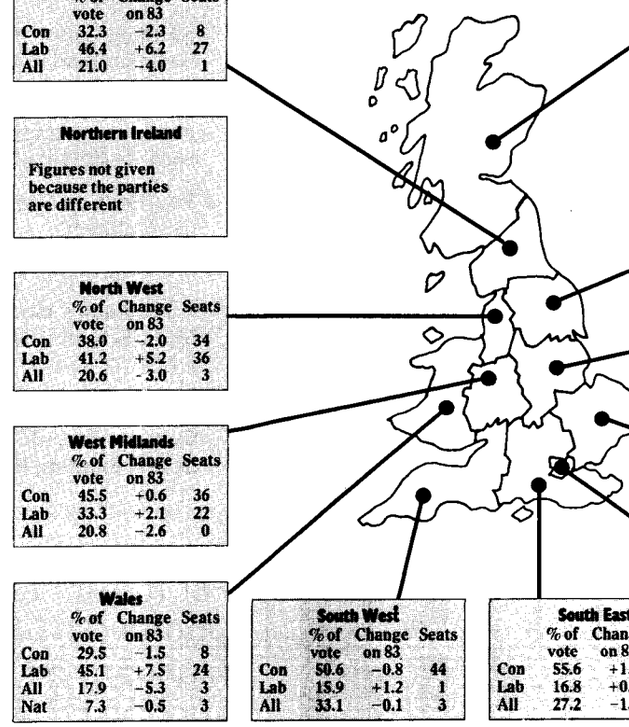
But there *are* places where it seems that 'the Left' does provide the explanation. Candidates in Ealing North and Walthamstow had to fight the election against a background of massive rates increases. Bernie Grant seems to have suffered from the campaign of vilification against him, and possibly from racism. And who knows what role anti-feminist and anti-gay feelings played in Ken Livingstone's reduced majority.

But what is one to say to that? In Ealing, the Labour council inherited dreadful services from the Tories. And the rates penalty means that over half the current rate income will go to the Treasury. Yet even now Ealing has one of the lowest rates in London.

And if there was a vote against Grant and Livingstone we must ask why the effect of the GLC's anti-racist and anti-sexist policies has waned so quickly. The implication is that more work should be done on these issues; not that we should go into reverse.

One thing we have to recognise is that political cultures, and the labour movement, and what will work to make a labour movement popular and successful, varies between different parts of

Map 2 The Regional Breakdown



North	% of vote	Change on 83	Seats
Con	32.3	−2.3	8
Lab	46.4	+6.2	27
All	21.0	−4.0	1

Northern Ireland

Figures not given because the parties are different

North West	% of vote	Change on 83	Seats
Con	38.0	−2.0	34
Lab	41.2	+5.2	36
All	20.6	−3.0	3

West Midlands	% of vote	Change on 83	Seats
Con	45.5	+0.6	36
Lab	33.3	+2.1	22
All	20.8	−2.6	0

Wales	% of vote	Change on 83	Seats
Con	29.5	−1.5	8
Lab	45.1	+7.5	24
All	17.9	−5.3	3
Nat	7.3	−0.5	3

South West	% of vote	Change on 83	Seats
Con	50.6	−0.8	44
Lab	15.9	+1.2	1
All	33.1	−0.1	3

South East	% of vote	Change on 83	Seats
Con	55.6	+1.1	107
Lab	16.8	+0.9	1
All	27.2	−1.8	0

Scotland	% of vote	Change on 83	Seats
Con	24.0	−4.4	10
Lab	42.4	+7.3	50
All	19.2	−5.3	9
SNP	14.0	+2.3	3

Yorks & Humberside	% of vote	Change on 83	Seats
Con	37.4	−1.2	21
Lab	40.6	+5.3	33
All	21.7	−3.9	0

East Midlands	% of vote	Change on 83	Seats
Con	48.6	+1.4	31
Lab	30.0	+2.1	11
All	21.0	−2.6	0

East Anglia	% of vote	Change on 83	Seats
Con	52.1	+1.2	19
Lab	21.7	+1.2	1
All	25.8	−2.5	0

Greater London	% of vote	Change on 83	Seats
Con	46.5	+2.6	58
Lab	31.5	+1.6	23
All	21.3	−3.5	3

Source: *Sunday Times*, 14 June 1987.

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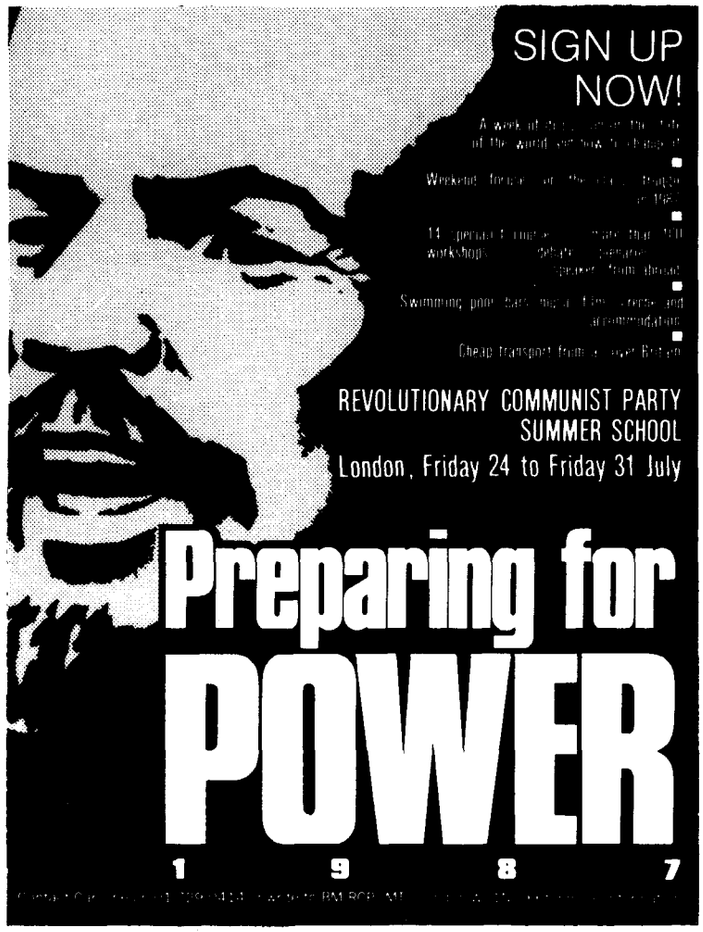

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Table 1 Profile of the Electorate

% of 1987 Total Voters		The 1983 Vote Con	Lab	All	The 1987 Vote Con	Lab	All
100	Total	44	28	26	43	32	23
49	Men	42	30	25	43	32	23
51	Women	46	26	27	43	32	23
14	18-24	42	33	22	33	40	21
19	25-34	40	29	29	39	33	25
33	35-54	44	27	27	45	29	24
34	55+	47	27	24	46	31	21
23	Pensioner	51	25	23	47	31	21
19	AB-prof/managerial	60	10	28	57	14	26
24	C1-white coller	51	20	27	51	21	26
27	C2-skilled workers	40	32	26	40	36	22
30	DE-semi-skilled/unskilled	33	41	24	30	48	20
67	Owner occupier	52	19	28	50	23	25
23	Council tenants	26	47	24	22	56	19
7	Private tenants	41	33	23	39	37	21
7	Men 18-24	41	35	21	42	37	19
7	Women 18-24	42	31	25	31	42	24
9	Men 25-34	37	34	28	41	33	24
10	Women 25-34	42	25	30	37	33	27
16	Men 35-54	42	29	27	42	32	24
17	Women 35-54	46	24	28	47	27	25
17	Men 55+	45	28	25	45	31	23
17	Women 55+	49	26	24	46	32	20
9	Men 65+	50	25	23	47	30	22
9	Women 65+	51	25	23	46	33	20
4	Unemployed men	25	49	24	21	56	20
3	Unemployed women	32	41	24	23	54	19
17	North men	35	39	24	34	42	20
19	North women	40	33	25	33	41	22
13	Midland men	43	31	23	46	34	19
13	Midland women	46	27	24	45	29	24
19	South men	48	23	28	49	22	28
20	South women	51	19	30	51	24	24
	Home owners						
36	Middle class	58	12	29	57	15	26
31	Working class	46	25	27	43	32	23
	Council tenants						
2	Middle class	32	39	25	28	41	24
21	Working class	25	49	24	21	58	18
	Trade unions						
23	Members	31	39	29	30	42	26
15	Men	29	41	28	31	42	25
8	Women	34	34	31	29	41	27

The statistics above are taken from an aggregate number analysis of 23,396 voters in Great Britain interviewed by Mori during the election, weighted to the actual outcome.
Source: *Sunday Times*, 14 June 1987.

Table 2 The New Divisions in the Middle Classes

	University Educated 1987 %	1983-87	Public Sector 1987 %	1983-87	Private Sector 1987 %	1983-87
Con	34	−9	44	−4	65	+1
Lab	29	+3	24	—	13	—
Lib/SDP	36	+4	32	+4	22	−1
Swing From:						
Con to Lab		6		2		−½
Lib/SDP to Lab		−½		−2		½
Lib/SDP to Con		−6½		−4		1

Source: *The Guardian*, 15 June 1987

'There is a real threat now of a divide between North and South within the Labour Party'

the country. It may be true that some of the issues discussed in London are harder to introduce in parts of 'the North'. It is equally true that northern forms of solidarism cannot be simply imported into the South. So slogans like 'Scotland shows the way to do it' *(The Observer)* are wrong. The Scottish way, the northern way, the Liverpool way even, none of them are going to pull in the punters in Billericay.

And like it or not it is in the South and the Midlands that the frontiers of Labour support have to be extended.

The problem seems to be this. Labour has emerged from this election stronger and more consolidated in a base which is electorally too small to win from. The first difficulty this leads to is that this base could be taken too much for granted. It mustn't be. It is about to come under intensified economic and political attack.

The second point is that on almost every dimension Labour has reinforced its position as the party of the 'have-nots'. It is right to point to the chasms that currently exist in British society, and Labour did so in the campaign. But the party must also avoid being only the party that cares, if all that means is redistribution. Redistribution is important, but it is not enough. We also have to say more about *why* those inequalities are produced, and have policies to challenge them at source. In the election, Labour was uncertain in its economic policy, and with reason. To be consistent and convincing to a wider audience, that policy will have to be *more* radical, not less.

The divide in this election was not a class divide. More, it was about immediate self-interest. The evidence is that the best predictor of how individuals would vote was whether they thought the economy had got better or worse, and what they perceived as happening to their living-standards. In other words, people of all classes who are doing well out of Thatcherism, or even who think they may, voted Tory. This cuts across the deeper social divisions. The temptation to buy your council house is far greater in the South where prices are rocketing, than in the North. So, with over 3m unemployed and manufacturing output still lower than in 1979, the Conservatives won the economic argument. Enough people feel they are doing OK.

That is the issue which faces us now. How are we going to address these groups? How are we to extend beyond Labour's traditional bases? This issue should now be at the centre of our debate. It is not going to be solved, indeed its solution will be hindered, by recriminations and knee-jerk reactions against incorrect targets like 'the left', however characterised. There are better, more positive, and more important things to do.●

This article has not tried to tackle Northern Ireland because it is a special case.

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Flexibility At The Coalface

Mick McGahey retires from the leadership of the NUM this month after a lifetime as one of its key activists. Here he talks to *Charlie Leadbeater* about his experiences

What are the important changes in the working class and the labour movement that you've seen? It seems more sharply divided than it used to be. Do you think its character and political orientation has changed markedly?

I entered the pits in 1939 when I became a pony driver. It was a backward, antiquated industry. In those days there were 80,000 Scottish miners. In Britain there were 850,000 miners. If you check back you'll find that Lenin referred to the 1912 strike of British miners when there were one million miners on strike for six weeks to establish a minimum wage. And a million miners, with their families, was 20% of the British population. Lenin described it as the biggest army of the proletariat ever to take to the streets of Europe.

All my life, it's been 'united you stand, divided you fall'. A great slogan. Which I don't dismiss and which I still hold to. 'United we stand, and divided we fall', oh yes. We must never, never disregard our past. But how do you get unity? There's an old American slogan: Can you spell union? If you take 'u' and 'i' out of union, what is left? It's 'non'. So unity is union, coming together.

Of course there'll be tremendous changes – tremendous changes in, for instance, size. There were not only 850,000 miners in 1939; there were 700,000 railwaymen, 600,000 steelworkers. So the character of the working-class has changed. Of course it's changed. If Neil Kinnock had 800,000 miners, 700,000 railwaymen, and 600,000 steelworkers, he'd have won the election. And there are people today who would not claim that they are working-class – they have a house, a mortgage, a car. But at the same time they have no good security, they still face the problems of capitalism. So the working class has changed. But those workers have to recognise that they still haven't got the security. And the old demands of the movement are still relevant – job security, unity, defence.

I couldn't work in the pit now. Those young miners are skilled engineers. They're not pick and shovel, they're not driving ponies. One coal face now is worth £3m. Miners, skilled young engineers, are handling it – and handling it in the knowledge that they can control it. I recommend you should read Paul Lafarge's *The Right to Be Lazy*, in which he was dealing with new technology in the first industrial revolution. And what was he arguing for? He was arguing for what Mick McGahey's arguing for – longer educational periods, shorter working hours, early retirement, increased payments and things like that. The arguments we're using today. But he argued for the right to be lazy. Where today we're arguing for the right to work. It's a nice contrast.

With that change in the working class how does socialist politics, the Communist Party, have to change? Can socialism still be a central powerful force in British politics?

Shall I put it this way – the class conflict will always be there, the class struggle will always be there. I noticed Mrs Thatcher was speaking about taking socialism off the agenda. Now with due respect Mrs Thatcher must recognise that as long as we have a system of society which is social production, people coming together in order to produce, the question of social ownership will always be there. So she can't take it from the agenda. If there's social companionship, social relationships in producing the necessities of life, the question of social ownership will always be there. She can't take socialism off the agenda. That's an economic and philosophical fact.

As I look back at our Communist movement, and the Communist Party – I've been a member of the Communist Party since I was 18, a member of the Young Communist League since I was 14 – I'm proud to be a Communist and proud to stand as a Communist. I look back on the mistakes of the past, but I'm not blaming anyone. It was a lack of experience. In 1929, for instance, our Communist Party was nine years old. What was the slogan of the Communist Party in 1929? 'Class against class'.

In 1931, what was the programme of the Communist Party? 'For a Soviet Britain'. Now, goodness. It demonstrated our immaturity. But please remember these courageous, courageous men and women of our Communist Party who were building something, an alternative to MacDonaldism. And I must say if anybody wants to know about class reductionism, that was an example. We didn't have the broad appeal, the wider appeal to the labour and democratic movement.

Do you think the working class, British society, has fundamentally turned away from notions of social solidarity, social obligation? How could these be rejuvenated?

I think we've got to approach it from the point of view that the Conservatives under the leadership of Thatcher have won certain major advances. Now I want to say quite frankly that the labour movement must concede defeats in order to learn how to succeed. There has been, too, an element of depoliticisation of the British workers. I walk through my housing scheme or the housing schemes adjacent to me, and I see that door with number 10 on it, which belongs to that family, and the car's standing in the carriageway, and he's got a job, and he feels that he's secure. He feels 'well what's wrong with Maggie Thatcher'. I don't accept that, but there's an element there, which we've to analyse.

The reason for that, of course, was that the labour movement was not outside his door explaining our position. The British working class has to some extent been depoliticised, and accepted what they think are the virtues of Thatcherism – Jack got on with it, and 'man mind thyself'. I think that's happened. It's an element of the total scene. But I reject it as the central element, because I still believe that the British working class – not only the British working class, but the British people – have got a wider opinion. We are humanitarian. Look at that assembly at Wembley (Live Aid), young people singing love to one another. I was proud. They weren't knocking one another with bottles over the head, they were singing love to one another. But they were also singing love to Ethiopians, to Africans, to their black fighting sisters and brothers.

But closer to home, the National Union of Mineworkers faces tremendous change. It does not seem to yet have a coherent response to British Coal's strategy to introduce flexible shifts, change working

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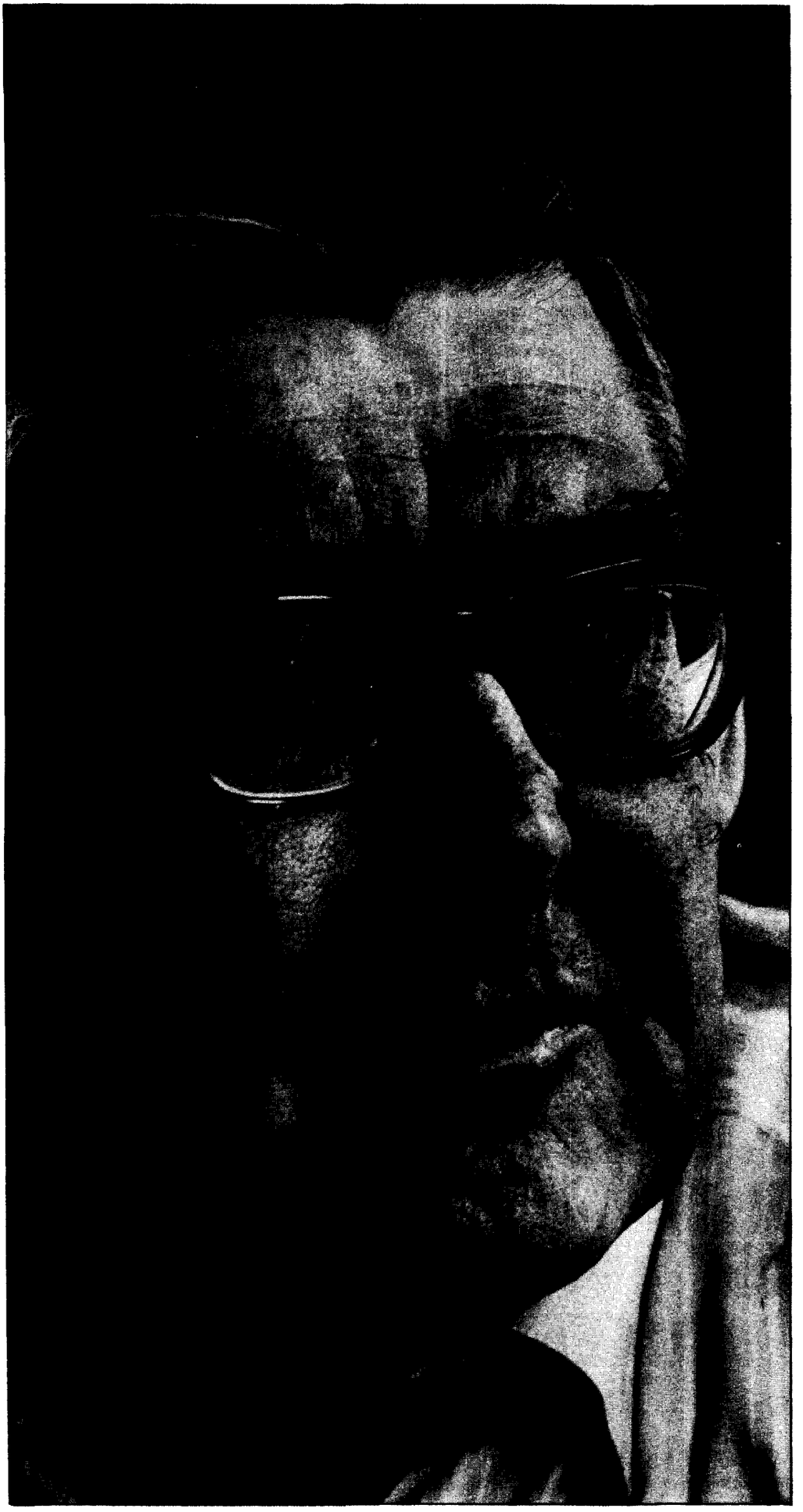

Photography: Murdo MacLeod

practices and all the rest of it . . . How should the union approach that strategy?
It was McGahey that raised it in the National Executive. I said right, let's have a face to face, word to word discussion with British Coal on their strategy in terms of the new technology – how they see it. And that we would collate and prepare our strategy on the new technology and then would have a discussion at our annual conference. I object strongly to some of the things that have been said – not to being called Luddite, because I would have been a Luddite: the Luddites had nothing else to fight with, and that is why they had to do what they did – the destruction of the cottage industry, things like that. The NUM is not Luddite. Miners are looking at new technology and miners unions in Britain will look at new technology. We Communists are in the miners union fighting for a positive policy on new technology – yes – but making sure that that new technology comes from the needs of miners and their communities, and the people in Britain.

You think that you can maintain your goals of job security, and better conditions but engage with British Coal's agenda?
Of course we can maintain a coherent union strategy. I remember 1948 when they brought job flexibility into the steel industry and continental shift working. At that time, by the way, social life was not as today – you didn't have football matches Wednesday nights and the television was not developed in people's homes as they are today – ah, but they went for flexibility. Now if it's a question of job flexibility, shift flexibility, you should ask the miner – this is my point – about listening. Listen to the miner and pose the question – you can have a week in every month in which you can be off your work and your wife and family can enjoy themselves. A full week every month – but to do that you will have to go into job and shift flexibility. I don't know, the miner might say, 'hey, I am for that'. Payment for change is an important question. Yes, we have got to be thinking. If you never move an inch, that is not a movement – that's a monument.

Can I ask you a different question – about the interests of miners in Nottinghamshire, who are members of the UDM. How do you move towards dialogue with them?
The United Mineworkers of Scotland was a breakaway union in 1928. People talk about Spencerism and the UDM . . . we've also got to learn that we had other sections in the past but Abe Moffat (the Scottish miners leader in the 1920s) learnt the lesson and we built one union in Scotland. And I am proud to sit with one Scottish union here. . . The question of unity – unity is an easy word, but how do you develop it, how do you practise it, how do you bring it about? And unity is a question of how you talk to people, but it's not only

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talking to people, it's also listening to them. You're listening to what they're saying, rather than always answering. Jumping on a bus before it arrives is a very dangerous practice. It's better if you wait and listen to what they're saying, get the benefit of their contribution, and have the dialogue. Dialogue is a good thing.

I think we are moving forwards. But, I have often said, and I will say again, if you have several thousand miners – and their wives and families – you can't treat them as untouchables. They are my people. They are wrongly directed. The UDM was created by McGregor and the Tory government; Lynk and his associates played the part of Judas Iscariot. They betrayed the miners by playing that part. But those miners, like those Christians, are not untouchables. How do we bring them back? I don't think we bring them back by just shouting scab, scab, scab... Forgiveness is not the monopoly of the Christians. Why can't we stop talking about blacklegs, scabs and things like that and say, 'Brother, our interests, your interests, my interests, need one union'.

What do you think the prospects are for a leadership emerging which would provide a different kind of political and industrial trajectory for the union, different from that laid out by Mr Scargill?

Well, first of all let me say that I believe that Arthur Scargill will be president of this union for many, many years to come. More important than being a great speaker and orator, I think he has got a dedication to the working class movement. That is more important than anything. In the future, the NUM will have to devise a strategy in which they recognise that the mining industry does not belong to miners ... and the mining industry does not belong to the Coal Board. And it doesn't belong to the government. The mining industry – this wonderful seam of energy – belongs to the people of Britain. The miners union needs to develop a strategy to say to the British people, 'Please help us to develop this tremendous asset that belongs to you. Not to us, but to the British people ... and please give us the best possible wages, conditions, service and hours, and all the rest of it, for those who produce that coal. It is your industry; it is your asset. We want to develop that.' If we produce a policy along these lines we will take the British people with us.

'The labour movement must concede defeats in order to learn how to succeed'

What is it about Scotland and its culture which has sustained the labour movement here as a real force?

You must first of all start from the premise that Scotland is a nation. We are a nation, we have a distinctive legal system, a distinctive educational system, we did have a distinctive language. Scotland is a nation, and we feel as a nation. In the labour movement we have built up a unity – Donald Dewar, the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, and Mick McGahey can sit down and have a nice chat. And Mick McGahey is a Communist. So Malcolm Rifkind has now found himself in the position in which – he may protest – he really does not speak for Scotland. The labour movement speaks for Scotland. Why? Because of that unity. We have got more rank and file involvement in Scotland. We have a rich heritage – the Scottish radical movement. Edinburgh was a rich Chartist city. So we have got all that tradition. But most importantly – our Communist Party in Scotland right from the early stages worked in the labour movement in such a way that they were able to draw together broad alliances. I never refer to it as just the broad alliance of the trade union and labour movement. It is the trade union labour movement and democratic movement. Look at the churches in Scotland – we have a wonderful relationship with the churches, of all denominations. Communists in Scotland and the labour movement in Scotland are unique. We have developed further than the narrow concept of class against class. We don't argue for a Soviet Scotland. We talk about the need for opening up and creating the conditions in which we might talk about a socialist Scotland as the next stage of development. Even in the light of the last general election. So Margaret can't take socialism off the agenda. ●

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PULL OUT

THE ART OF CYCLING

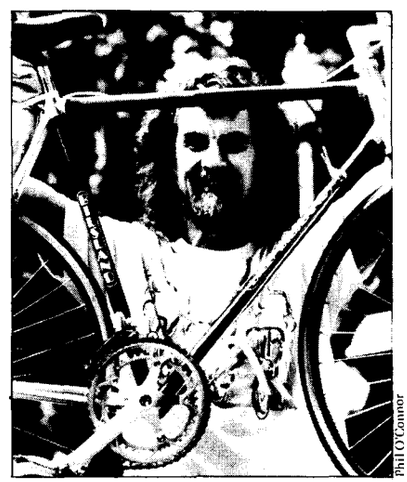
More and more people are taking heed of the imperative 'On yer bike'. *Marxism Today* considers why and offers some hints to two-wheeled aspirants.

Transports of delight

Paul Weller and Eric Clapton do it. Norman Tebbit urged it on the unemployed. Duncan Campbell does it in pursuit of the truth, while Billy Connolly gets unexpectedly lyrical about it. Lord Longford and the Dutch royal family are well known for it. Alexei Sayle and Michael Palin do it. Just about everyone in China does it. Three-quarters of the children in Britain have learned to do it before the age of seven, and, although lots of people do it on their own, most people seem to like doing it best in groups. *Marxism Today* people do it, of course.

Cycling. It's undergone an amazing transformation in the last ten years or so, to become not only one of the fastest growing outdoor activities in Britain (28,000 people entered the London to Brighton Bike Run last year and raised £0.5m for the British Heart Foundation) but also a very stylish pursuit. A cult even. Cheap, chic, ecologically sound, good for your health *and* politically right-on, cycling has just about everything going for it – except an immensely powerful road lobby and current government transport policy. Cycling is an activity which bears out the truth of the adage 'the personal is political'. It's both a personal affair and a political statement – not that there's anything inherently political about riding a bike, of course, but efforts to discriminate against it have the inevitable effect of turning cycling into a political activity. Getting 'on your bike' these days is just a little bit subversive.

It has taken a decade for cycling to shake off its baggy-shorts-and-hairy-knees image. Today, however, top fashion houses vie with one another to incorporate the cycling 'look' and leading pop groups – like Madness, Queen and Style Council – have made it part of their image. Cycling clothes and accessories have a sharp functional elegance (and real street-cred) which is both dateless and bang up-to-date.



Phil O'Connor

Billy Connolly's a cycling addict. He does 20 miles around Richmond Park every day and takes his bike on top of his car when he's touring. Cycling's even found its way into his stage act and you can hear his thoughts on such arcane subjects as 'penile numbness' (scourge of serious male cyclists, apparently) on his LP Wreck on Tour. He can be quite lyrical about cycling as well as rude: 'When I ride my bike something happens to my soul . . . Something dances in me.'
(Courtesy Bicycle Magazine)

The hey-day of cycling was in the 1930s, but after the war the bottom dropped out of the market as Britain became more and more a nation of car fanatics; today we have the dubious distinction of being the world leader in terms of numbers of cars per mile of road. Although the number of bikes being sold has increased dramatically since 1972, paradoxically, the number of people actually riding them has fallen, as more and more cyclists are literally squeezed off the roads by more powerful road users.

Today's machines are products of the latest developments in technological wizardry, ergonomics and aerodynamic design. And there are models for all seasons – bikes for shopping and commuting, folding bikes, bikes for touring, track-racing and road-racing, and mountain bikes with romantic names like 'Muddy Fox' for covering the roughest terrain.

Research is going forward to refine and market a recumbent bike with a streamlined body shell to improve aerodynamic efficiency and give speeds up to 50 miles per hour. But the classic safety bike, the basic shape of which has scarcely changed this century, goes on and on – perhaps the most perfect combination of people and machinery ever invented.

The cycle of today is faster, door-to-door, than a bus or a train or a car in urban areas. Above all it's under your own control. Cycling is something *you* do, not something that gets done to you.

Ina Myatt

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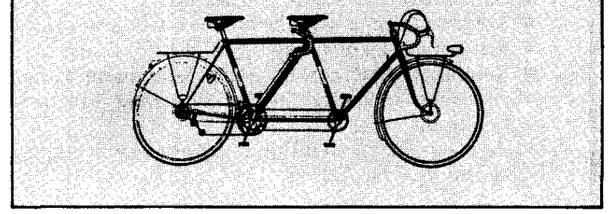
The campaigners



Examples abound of instances of discrimination against people using bicycles. Sir George Young MP recently remarked that had his old departmental officials known that he was transporting government files around by bike, he would have been asked to stop such a risky and unseemly habit. He also caused security headaches at a recent Tory Party conference by shackling his bike up to the railings outside the hall.

Similarly, cycling only gets a mention in the press when the story is bizarre. A minister on a bike? That's pretty wacky. Celebrities who cycle – how peculiar. Yet everyone knows that cycling has been booming since the mid-70s, and that cycling is basically a 'good thing'. However, people do not stop to consider just *how* good cycling is – socially, economically, and environmentally.

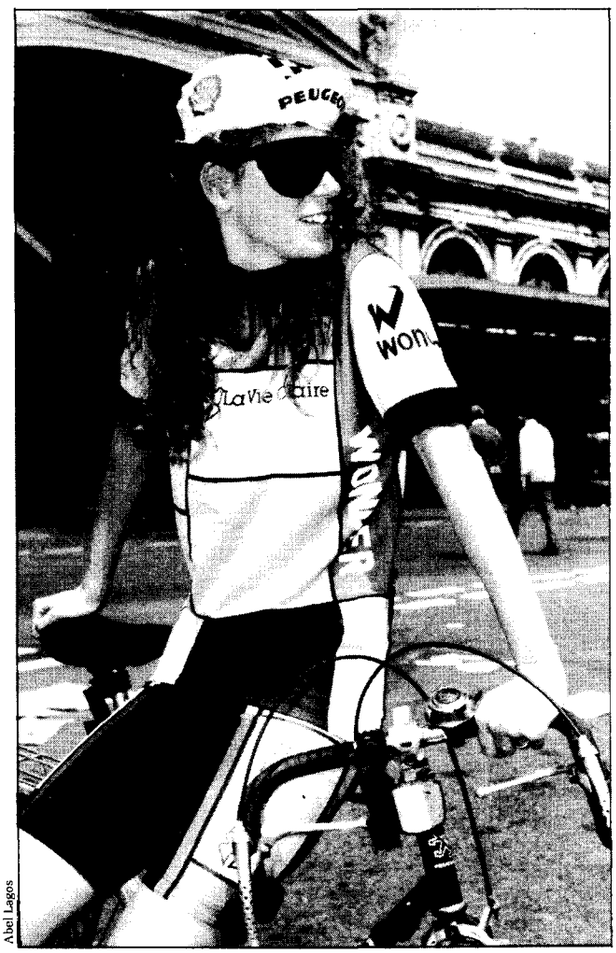
FoE have published a new policy document emphasising the importance of cycling. More than three quarters of all trips made by people in this country are less than five miles long – a distance that the vast majority of the population could easily achieve on a bike. Imagine the savings in oil consumption that would result if just a small proportion of the trips currently made by private car were to be made by bike. Imagine the reduction this would make to the deadly car fumes currently killing forests, lakes and people throughout Europe.

Imagine also the savings on new roads, which at the moment are said to be required to reduce congestion. In addition the cost of one cycle parking stand is only £100 – car parking spaces can cost several thousand pounds.

Central government remains reluctant to spend money to promote cycling, arguing that it is the responsibility of local authorities. They, of course, no longer have the money or freedom to do what many of them would like. There are, however, a number of councils leading the way. Manchester boasts the unique Greater Manchester Cycling Project, a team working to bridge the gap between council and cyclist, providing technical advice and a focus for promotional work. The city council has allocated up to 3% of its capital transport budget to cycling measures – more, even, than the GLC during the heady days of the Cycling Project Team.

Cities such as Southampton, Nottingham, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Oxford and Bristol are also responding to the needs of cyclists in a variety of ways. They have clearly recognised the enormous benefits to be derived from encouraging people out of their cars and onto bikes. Perhaps even more importantly, they are making cycling safer and more attractive for the huge section of the population who do not own cars, and who are presently heavily penalised by Conservative transport policies.

Andy Clarke



Abel Lagos

Cycling gear is sharp and functionally elegant: this Mondrian-inspired shorts and top – the Art of Politics meets the art of cycling? – is available from Bike, Floral Street, London WC2.

Urban cycling

Recently the Milan city authorities placed 500 new bicycles at the public's disposal, to ride around and leave for each other wherever they stopped. Unfortunately the scheme collapsed within 2 days with only 50 bikes left intact! However this well-intentioned initiative had at least shown a recognition that the promotion of cycling was of benefit to the city!

The GLC, when it existed, was working in different ways to the same end. Its Cycling Project Team spent 1% of the transport budget (some £2m a year) on cycle schemes. In the post-abolition chaos, there is no longer a statutory authority with an overview of transport policy in London. There is certainly no commitment to cyclists. The Department of Transport has said that cycling should be encouraged, but it is clear that its planning priorities are dictated by an overwhelming commitment to motorised traffic. Its policy of road building and 'improvements' designed to reduce congestion has merely encouraged more commuter cars into the city. Its adverts on hoardings cautioning us to 'Be Bright at Night', imply that it is usually the fault of cyclists if we're involved in accidents.

The London Cycling Campaign has views on what action should be taken by local authorities to facilitate cycling. New traffic management schemes could be planned with cyclists, pedestrians and residents in mind, avoiding solutions which are only of benefit to motorists. One way systems, for example, increase car speeds and create detours and hazards for pedestrians and cylists. Further measures would include: cycle parking facilities in all shopping areas and near community facilities; lockable sheds on council estates; secure parking for bikes at workplaces, and where possible changing facilities.

Figures show that while Londoners own 1.2 million bicycles, only 250,000 are used regularly, indicating that a huge number of people would cycle if conditions were more favourable. Many of these measures would benefit pedestrians as well as cyclists, and facilities for bikes such as carriage space on trains or storage arrangements would also improve mobility for people using wheelchairs and prams. This may sound like Utopia, but it is a reality already in many European cities.

Jo Child

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Me and my bike

My most enduring love affair has lasted for over a quarter of a century. It's not just a sexual thing – that seductive feel of cold tubular steel and warm leather. No, this goes deeper than that. This relationship was born to go places.

Ever since my parents bought me a three-wheel 'Gresham Flyer' when I was eight, I've had an unbroken chain of two-wheel lovers cycling through my life.

From rusty 1930s sit-up-and-begs to fancy French flyweights you can lift with your pinky, I've ridden 'em all, kid.

My current bike is a solid 12-gear Raleigh town bike which I saw advertised in the local paper for seventy quid, and I must say it's served me well. It got me to Brighton for the sponsored Heart Foundation run, and recently to Oxford for Nicaragua. Cycling against the Contra-flow. Right on.

A word for the uninitiated: I used to think that while you couldn't drink and drive, cycling in a pie-eyed state would prove no problem. Wrong.

Some eighteen months ago, after imbibing more than six pints of Scudworth's Headbanger I attempted cycling home. Half a mile from my house I blacked-out, regaining consciousness several hours later in a hospital bed to find I had acquired a broken nose, black eye and generally stitched-up face.

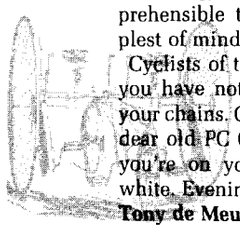
Did it stop me cycling? Hell no. Just like ol' Duke Wayne after his horse has thrown him I was straight back in the saddle. But from now on, kids, biking-and-boozing gets the Golden No-No.

Curb Your Drinking – Don't Kerb Your Face!

I guess the humble bicycle isn't ready yet to take its place as the twentieth century sexual icon, but it does provide a great way of getting about, it's a good source of exercise, and the technology of this beast is comprehensible to even the simplest of minds.

Cyclists of the world unite – you have nothing to lose but your chains. Or in the words of dear old PC George Dixon, 'If you're on your bike – wear white. Evenin' all.'

Tony de Meur



CYCLOPEDIA

Safety

- Plan your route before you set out.
- Keep your fingers on the brakes near dangerous spots.
- Keep at least a metre away from parked cars.
- Remember that most accidents happen near junctions or when changing lanes.
- At roundabouts get in the right lane and move out when clear. Don't dither. Be positive.
- Be seen. Proper lighting is mandatory at night and reflective gear is essential at all times.

Legal matters

You must not ride On footpaths parallel to the road or any path where there is a 'No Cycling' sign, *or* along motorways, *or* if under the influence of drink or drugs, *or* while holding onto another vehicle, without lights or carrying a passenger. You *can* ride along roads reserved for buses or taxis and in with-flow bus lanes.

Insurance: Knocking down a pedestrian or scraping a car's paintwork could cost you a lot of money unless you are covered by third party insurance.

If you or your bike is damaged because of bad road surfaces you can usually claim compensation from the body responsible (usually the relevant local council).

Take legal advice if you are involved in an accident. Most cycling organisations can refer you to a 'user-friendly' solicitor.

(From *On Your Bike* published by the London Cycling Campaign £1.35)

Some relevant (and not so relevant) facts

- A cycle can be pedalled for 1600 miles using the same amount of energy as is contained in one gallon of fuel.
- Seven cycles can be parked comfortably in the same space as one car.
- A recent study commissioned by BR showed that bikes on trains could generate £10 million more revenue.
- If 10% of journeys to work by car were made by bike, a saving of 14 million barrels of oil a year would result.
- 15 people are killed every day by motor vehicles in Britain.
- Car congestion on roads costs an estimated £3 billion every year in Britain.

Organisations

The Cyclists' Touring Club, 69 Meadrow, Godalming, Surrey (04868 7217). The largest British cycling organisation. Offers legal aid, insurance, touring advice etc.
Friends of the Earth, 377 City Road, London EC1 (01 837 0731).
London Cycling Campaign, 3 Stamford St, London SE1 (01 928 7220).
National Bike Club, c/o RoSPA, Cannon House, The Priory, Birmingham.
British Cycling Federation, 16 Upper Woburn Place, London WC1 (01 387 9320).
British Triathlon Association, 3 Porters Drive, Dagenham, Essex. The sport that combines running, swimming and cycling.
Bike Events, PO Box 75, Bath, Avon. Organisers of the London-to-Brighton cycle ride and many other events, including cycle holidays.

Some useful books

Cycling: A Source Book, Philip Ennis, Pelham Books £5.95
Cyclists Britain, John Ray, Pan/Ordnance Survey £5.95
Richard's Bicycle Book, Richard Ballantine, Pan £2.95
Cycling in Europe, Nicholas Crane, Haynes £7.95
On Your Bike, London Cycling Campaign £1.35
Penguin Book of the Bicycle, R Watson and M Gray £2.95

Calendar of events

2-26 July The most spectacular sporting event in the world. From Berlin to Paris. Britain is entering a team for the first time in 20 years. And it's being televised on C4.
12 July London to Cambridge Bike Ride in Aid of WWF.
19 July Variety Club Bikeathon. Battersea Park.
26 July-8 August The Great British Bike Ride (London to the Isle of Skye). Organised by Bike Events.
12-16 August The Kelloggs Professional Tour of Britain, finishing in central London and covered by television.
15-30 August The End to End, John O'Groats to Lands End. Bike Events.
23, 30 August, 6, 13, 20 September City Centre Cycling. Held in different cities each Sunday and culminating in a race around central London.
6 September Four Corners Around the World Bike Ride arrives in London from Amsterdam.

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The Tamil Tragedy

Rajiv Gandhi's efforts to intervene in Sri Lanka demonstrate its importance to internal Indian politics. But, argues **Meghnad Desai**, the island's conflicts have their roots in the British Empire

India's gesture in delivering relief supplies to the Tamil population living in the Jaffna peninsula has brought the complex ethnic tragedy being played out in Sri Lanka to the world's attention. While much attention focused on the initial bungled attempt to send the packages by boats and then the airdrop, it is the multiple problems of ethnicity, nationalism and poverty underlying the situation that deserve attention.

Sri Lanka has an overwhelming majority (74%) of Sinhalese speaking people most of whom are Buddhists. It also has a Tamil speaking population (18%) most of whom are Hindus.

The Tamil population has two concentrations. All around the north and east coast, there is a belt of Tamil population who are original inhabitants. In the late sixteenth century when the Portuguese arrived in Sri Lanka, there was a Tamil kingdom as well as two Sinhalese ones. Indeed neither the Portuguese nor the Dutch empires unified Sri Lanka. It was the British who, after 1815, set up a single administration for the country.

The British also made parts of Sri Lanka into a plantation economy, first for coffee cultivation and then, when the coffee market collapsed in the late nineteenth century, for tea and rubber. It was to work the plantations that they imported Indian Tamil labourers on indenture terms.

This was part of the movement of labour from one peripheral area of world capitalism to other peripheral areas – Indians to Sri Lanka, Malaya, Fiji, South Africa and the Caribbean; Chinese to Malaya and Indonesia; Africans to the Caribbean. In Sri Lanka, there are still the remnants of that movement. There are about 100,000 Indian Tamils in the central highlands where the plantations are.

Conflicts of ethnic, linguistic and religious sorts have been endemic to South Asia. They have outlived the imperial presence which encouraged them. But it was uneven development of different regions (coast versus interior), and the different response of the various groups to western education and administration, that provided the differentiation among the groups on the eve of independence. While every country proclaimed national unity, the populist pressures of democratic politics have served to put a premium on sub-nationalist identification.

India split into two countries on religious lines in 1947, whereas Pakistan split in 1971 on linguistic and territorial grounds. During this process, Bengal split in 1947, based on religious grounds, but did not come together again in 1971 in spite of the linguistic (Bengali) nationalism displayed by Bangladeshi freedom fighters. Nationhood remains a complex issue and neither ethnicity, religion nor language is sufficient to define it exclusively.

Sri Lanka did not witness a mass freedom movement, even of non-violent, reformist type, as India did. Transfer of power was a cosy affair from the British to the Anglicised Ceylonese elite from 1931 onwards. In 1948, when independence was formally granted, Ceylonese politics became formally democratic, based on adult franchise. But the elite could be forgiven for thinking that it could be managed along old rules.

Populist pressures were felt immediately when Indian Tamils working in the plantations were disenfranchised. This was to allay Sinhalese fears about being swamped (by one twentieth of the population). The battle shifted then to the question of an official language.

The elite split when Bandaranaike shifted ground and took a populist, chauvinist stand on Sinhala being the sole official language. This gave his party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), an ovewhelming majority in 1956 when they defeated the United National Party (UNP) which had been the elite coalition at the transfer of power in 1948. Both then and since, the Sri Lanka Tamils have elected a bloc of MPs who have fought a steady battle for the restoration of Tamil rights.

The resentment against the Tamils cites the initial advantage in government jobs and in commerce acquired by them during the British rule. An amalgam of anti-western feeling, chauvinism and egalitarianism characterises the Sinhala Buddhist populism. The Sinhalese are said to be the original settlers, arriving from India in mythical antiquity, and the chosen people to defend Buddhism. The Sinhalese claim to be a minority under threat from their larger Hindu neighbours in India.

As is typical of such propaganda, whether from the National Front or the Hindu Mahasabha, the overwhelming majority is portrayed as a minority threatened with extinction by the fast breeding minority.

Politicians have fed this populism and benefited from it. One after another the westernised, secular leadership of the various parties succumbed to the temptation to play the ethnic card. The SLFP under Bandaranaike was the first, but soon the two Marxist parties, the Communist Party (Moscow related) and the Lanka Sama Samaj Party (Trotskyist) also joined the bandwagon. The JVP, which led the student insurrection in April 1971 on a Maoist platform, also initially took a Sinhala nationalist line, though subsequently their leader Rohan Wijeewara has modified it.

In 1972, the SLFP and its leftwing (sic) partners put through a new constitution in which Sinhala became the official language and, as the Tamils saw it, minority safeguards were curtailed. A distinction was made between persons

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and citizens, only the latter with full guarantees. It was in the 1970s that the Tamil United National Liberation Front (TUNLF), a coalition of parliamentary parties with Tamil support, resolved to fight for regional autonomy.

In 1977, the SLFP and its partners lost overwhelmingly to the UNP. From 115 seats in the 1970 parliament, the coalition won only 8 seats, with the 'left' parties getting none at all. The UNP went up from 17 to 139 seats. The only bloc of opposition MPs were the TUNLF with 18 seats. The UNP is, if such things can be quantified, less chauvinist than the SLFP. It is more favourable to foreign capital and hence technically a right wing party. It has however favoured some accommodation for the Tamil minority, unlike the SLFP. It is a paradox therefore that it is during its regime that Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict has taken on a military character.

The reasons for this are various. There have been repeated episodes of ethnic riots in which Tamils living in Sinhala areas have been under threat. The worst episodes were 1977 and 1983. The reaction has been for the Tamil youth to take to guerilla warfare in order to establish a Tamil homeland.

This is where India enters the scene. For 30 years now negotiations have been going on to repatriate the Indian Tamils in Ceylon. After much-protacted talks, there has been a compromise of granting some of them Sri Lankan citizenship, while repatriating the rest.

There has been no alacrity in moving on either front. This has left fear and uncertainty among the Indian Tamils, and has been a gift for chauvinist propaganda as far as the Sinhala Buddhists are concerned. It is a classic instance of petty bourgeois consciousness inflamed by economic pressures and poverty, which it can blame on 'foreign' workers.

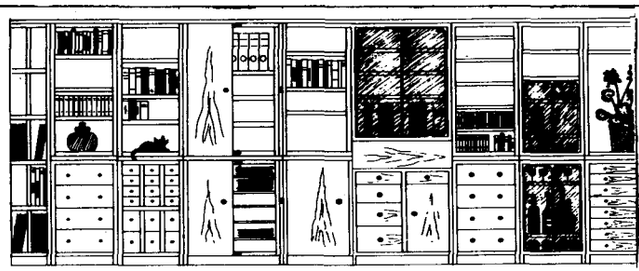
But the counterpart of this in India is no less virulent. The large and populous state of Tamilnadu is only 22 miles across the Palk straits from Sri Lanka. Its 60m Tamils have been reared on a politics of Tamil consciousness ever since the 1950s. Since then the populist Dravid Munnetra Kazhagan (DMK) and its subsequent offshoots have been the dominant rivals of the Congress party in Tamilnadu. In the 1960s, it was thought, though always denied, that the DMK was a secessionist party. It certainly acted to check the attempts to impose Hindu as a national language all over India.

Thus the Tamils of Tamilnadu have fared better than their Sri Lankan brothers and sisters. They have reconciled their Tamil nationality with their Indian (supra) nationality.

But Rajiv Gandhi knows, from the troubles with Sikh nationalism in Punjab and the Assamese treatment of Bengali migrants, that this is not something he can take for granted. Tamilnadu wants him to do something about the Sri Lanka Tamils, who derive much material and emotional support from their Indian base. India is also the regional superpower. It has the military strength and the economic clout to be a sub-imperial country. Its stand so far has been that it will offer its good offices to bring about negotiations between the Sri Lankan government and the TUNLF. However, although there was a round-table discussion in Bhutan in 1985, not much has happened since then.

'The secular leadership of the various parties succumbed to the temptation to play the ethnic card'

Once before, in 1971, India intervened in an internal dispute in Pakistan by moving troops into East Pakistan and helping to set up Bangladesh. Subsequently it withdrew its troops and has taken no further steps to dominate Bangladesh. The reason cited then was the influx of refugees into India and the problems that this was creating. At present, India's objectives are humanitarian, officially at least. If however the conflict were to worsen, and many Tamils to cross the Palk strait into India, it is still possible that there could be a 'Cyprus' solution to the Sri Lankan problem. But if this does happen, it will be as much to contain the 'national question' in India as to solve it in Sri Lanka. In any case, such a solution is unlikely to alleviate the poverty and suffering of the millions on either side. ●



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Blue Election, Election Blues

Labour fought a good, competent campaign. But, **Stuart Hall** argues, there is no way such a traditionalist appeal can any longer deliver the goods.

Frank Spooner Pictures

Kinnock and Hattersley: is the dream ticket still valid?

Thatcherism's third term was not unexpected, but the reality of it is devastating and will take some time to think through properly. It is all the more depressing because, in the event, Labour had such a good campaign. For three weeks it looked like a party that could actually win and hold power. Kinnock's self-confidence, though over-played, proved infectious. Organisationally, the party looked for once as if it belonged to the 20th century. The manifesto was muddled; but, once the campaign got off the ground, it found an image and acquired political definition. Labour managed to 'stage' a broad political choice for the nation between the party of greed, privilege and self-interest and the party of caring, collective provision and the underprivileged. This was the only chance Labour had, and it went for it with surprising energy.

However, though Labour's 'good' campaign put heart into party activists and the committed Left, it did not in the end shift the overall disposition of the vote. Some voters may have changed their minds but the swings cancelled one another out. There was no massive change of heart in the final three weeks. Few voters, for instance, seem to have been swayed by the famous party election television broadcasts, which caused such excitement amongst media pundits and so much heart-searching amongst the Labour faithful. The election, in short, was won (ie, lost) in those terrible months and years since 1983. Thatcherism's victory was rooted not in any temporary fluctuations of support, but in the deep movements and tendencies which have been re-shaping the British political map. The problem the Left now faces is structural and organic.

One clue to this may lie in a persistent trend over the past five years. Asked

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John Sturrock/Network

Margaret and Norman celebrate their third victory

what *policies* they supported, significant majorities consistently preferred Labour on unemployment, health, housing, education – the 'welfare' issues. During the campaign, these remained the most important issues for the majority of voters polled. In fact, Labour actually had some success in pushing them up the political agenda. However, both before and during the election, if asked about *image* – who was 'doing a good job', 'giving the country a lead', making people 'feel good to be British again' – a majority consistently said 'Maggie'. The same thing has been going on in America, where no majorities could be found for specific policies like winding up welfare programmes, yet, when it came to 'making you feel good to be American', people said Ronnie was their baby.

One way of interpreting this trend is that, increasingly, the electorate is thinking politically, not in terms of *policies* but of *images*. This doesn't mean that policies don't matter. It does mean that policies don't capture people's political imaginations unless constructed into an *image* with which they can identify. Far from this being a sign of voter irrationality, there are a number of quite 'rational' reasons why there should be a trend in this direction in the advanced 'class democracies' like Britain and the US.

'In and through images, fundamental political questions are being posed and argued through'

First, we live in a world where decisions are both complex and remote, and the big bureaucracies of state and market control a great deal of social life. So people are quite 'rational' to believe that they can't intervene with much hope of success, *in detail*, into policy matters, nor can they affect the fine-tuning of economic or policy machines.

Second, the electorate is now mercilessly exposed to ceaseless massaging by the media and to 'disinformation' from the politicians. It isn't surprising that politics, too, is being absorbed into this game of impression-management.

Third, voters know perfectly well that, these days, a five-year mandate will be interpreted any way the party in power likes. The abolition of the GLC was never 'popular' but that didn't stop Mrs Thatcher from doing what was politically expedient. Democracy, even in the narrow sense of 'government by popular consent', didn't once sully the lips of a single Tory spokesperson, and is a concept altogether foreign to Thatcherism's universe. 'Choice' was counterposed to 'democracy' precisely because, whereas the latter is public and social, the former can be defined in wholly private and individual (ie, 'family') terms.

In all these circumstances, people aren't wrong to imagine that what is required of them as citizens is simply to express a broad, undefined 'preference' for one scenario or another, this image or that. Some people regard this

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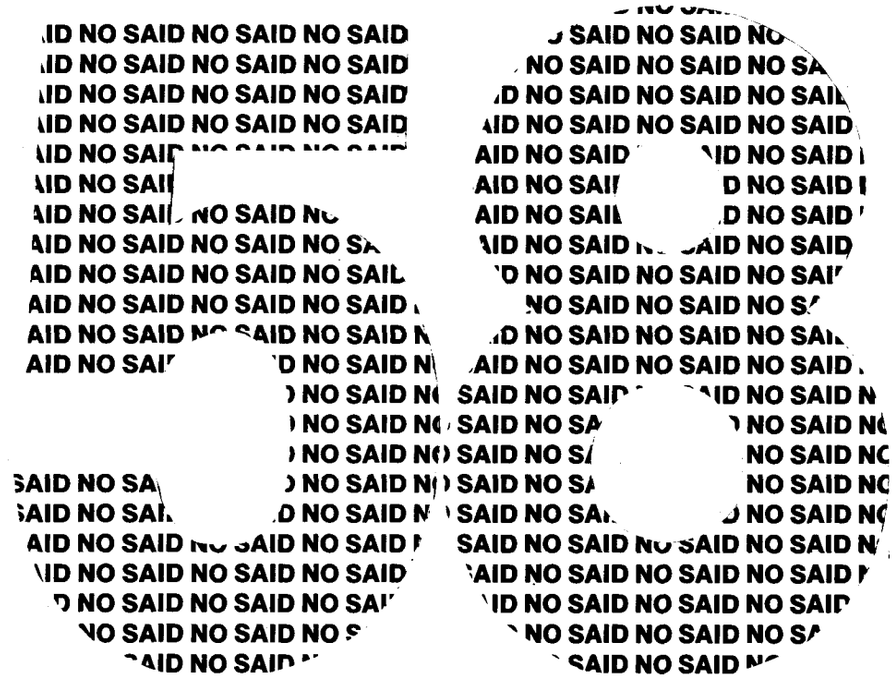
A COMMUNIST PARTY CAMPAIGN



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as a trivialisation of politics. But images are *not* trivial things. In and through images, fundamental political questions are being posed and argued through. We need to take them more seriously than we do. Mrs Thatcher claimed she was excited to be not just fighting for power, but helping to 'set the agenda for the 21st century'. But, how else can you discuss what Britain and the British people are to become, except in terms of broad images? The future has to be imagined – 'imaged', to coin a word.

'The whole point of Thatcherism as a form of politics has been to construct a new social bloc'

The question of political imagery is not a matter of presentation, but of *ideology*, which is a different and altogether more serious matter. One reason why Labour did better than most of us expected is that, this time, it did engage in ideological struggle. One reason why the campaign failed to shift minds, hearts and votes, was that it lost that struggle, despite its efforts. And part of the reason why Labour lost it is that, while it has only just begun to take these questions seriously, Thatcherism has been intervening ideologically with consummate skill *ever since 1979*.

Why has it taken Labour and the Left more generally so long to appreciate the strategic importance of the ideological arena? In part, the answer lies in the way the Left normally thinks about 'politics'. Electoral politics – in fact, every kind of politics – depends on political identities and identifications. People make identifications symbolically: through social imagery, in their political imaginations. They 'see themselves' as one sort of person or another. They 'imagine their future' within this scenario or that. They don't just think about voting in terms of how much they have, their so-called 'material interests'. Material interests matter profoundly. But they are always *ideologically defined*.

Contrary to a certain version of marxism, which has as strong a hold over the Labour 'Centre' as it does on the so-called 'hard Left', material interests, on their own, have no necessary class belongingness. They influence us. But they are not escalators which automatically deliver people to their appointed destinations, 'in place', within the political-ideological spectrum.

One reason why they don't is because people have *conflicting* social interests, sometimes reflecting conflicting identities. As a worker a person might put 'wages' first: in a period of high unemployment, 'job security' may come higher; a woman might prioritise 'child-care'. But what does a 'working woman' put first? Which of her identities is the one that determines her political choices? Take another example. I am a socialist and therefore passionately in favour of state education. But I am also a parent with a child who is taking O levels in a hard-pressed LEA. Do I stick by my political principles or squeeze her into a 'better' school?

John Sturrock/Network

The flags out at Tory HQ

In fact, the harder things get in Thatcher's Britain and the more competitive they become, the more divided society is. And the more divided it is, the more these ideological conflicts bear down on people's actual lives, cutting their 'natural' social and political identifications in two. Appealing to the 'real experience' of poverty or unemployment or underprivilege won't do the trick. Even poverty and unemployment have to be ideologically defined. A young unemployed person *may* interpret this experience to mean that you should work and vote to change the system. But it could equally be defined as a sign that you should throw your fortune in with the winners, climb on the bandwagon, earn a fast buck and look after 'number one'. Material interests did not, on their own, guarantee an automatic majority for Labour in the working-class this time, and it won't necessarily do so in the future *because it never has*.

This does not mean that ideology determines everything. If nobody was prospering under Thatcherism, ideology alone could not parachute such an 'illusion' into the heads of the majority. However, if *some* people are doing well – as they are, especially, in personal terms, in the 'South' – and the ideological climate is right, and the alternative ways of measuring how 'well' you are doing are effectively silenced or stigmatised, then the small number who define themselves as 'doing well' will be swelled by a much larger number who identify with this way of 'getting on'. Elections are won or lost not just on so-called 'real' majorities, but on (equally real) 'symbolic majorities'. Mrs Thatcher's 'symbolic majority' includes all who identify ideologically with the enterprise culture as the way of the future, who see themselves in their political imagination as likely to be lucky in the next round. They form an 'imaginary community' around Thatcherism's political project.

The whole point of Thatcherism as a form of politics has been to construct a new social bloc, and in this project ideology is critical. A social bloc is, by definition, *not* homogeneous. It does not consist of one whole class or even part of one class. It has to be constructed out of groups which are very different in terms of their material interests and social positions. The question is, can these differences of position and interest be constructed into a 'unity'? (It never is a unity, in the strict sense.) Can these diverse identities be welded together into a 'collective will'?

In the second term, Thatcherism did not make a single move which was not also carefully calculated in terms of this hegemonic strategy. It stepped up the pace of privatisation. But it took care, at every step, to harness new social constituencies to it, to 'construct' an image of the new, share-owning working class, and to expand the bloc, symbolically, around the image of 'choice'. It has not only attacked state education and the health service. It has created, side by side and in competition with them, among the majority of users and right in the heart of the working class, an alternative image: quicker service via private health and a better chance for kids in a deregulated education system – the 'fast-lane' schools and inner-city technology colleges.

Don't for a moment underestimate the resonance which a slogan like 'power to the people' carries in our over-bureaucratised, over-managed, under-resourced society. Of course, only a few can actually *choose* to be better off in these ways. But, for the time being, a lot of people think this is the only way open to them to advance in a society where competition and selectivity have become the name of the game. If that's the only game in town, some of them will play it!

Building a new social bloc means not only 'symbolically' including as many different groups as you can in your project, but also symbolically excluding the enemy. The 'loony Left' image was one powerful example. Once the one-liner was launched, the deep symbiosis between Thatcherism and the press guaranteed it an uninterrupted flight. It locked together in a single image high rates and political extremism with those powerful subliminal themes of race and sex. The discourse of the 'loony Left' was a code. In London it made it possible to expunge the legacy of the GLC, and to bring into the election, race (the anti-anti-racism backlash) and sex (the anti-feminism, anti-gay, anti-permissive, post-Aids backlash –

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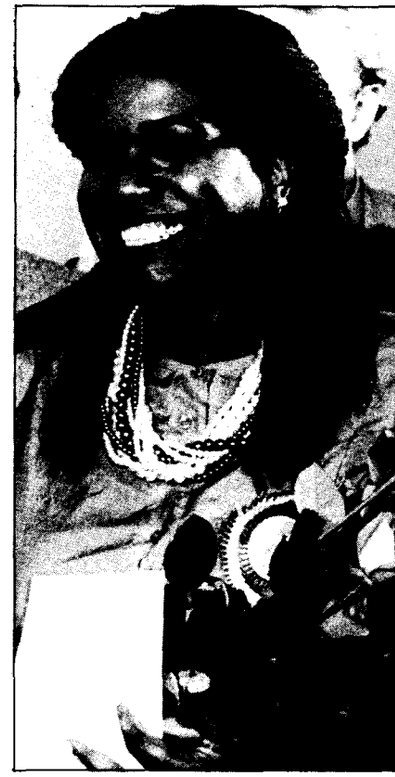
Thatcherism's hidden 'moral agenda') without a word having to be explicitly spoken. So successful was it that the Labour leadership, the party machine, much of the traditional 'hard Left', slick *New States-men* and all, could also make a heavy investment in it without having to reveal their hand about race, feminism or sexual politics.

Instead of engaging with the 'loony Left' image, Labour in effect colluded with it. In the weeks before the election, the leadership cast its vote unflinchingly for the 'traditional' image, in search of the 'traditional Labour voter'. Again, everybody understood that this, too, was a code. It is a code for 'back to the respectable, moderate, trade unionist, male-dominated working-class'. Mr Kinnock appeared as a manly, 'likely lad' who owed everything to the welfare state. His 'familial' image carried not a single echo or trace of feminist struggles over two decades. The investment in 'strong leadership' and in 'ordinariness' carried its own message. It signalled the distancing of Labour from all those 'fringe issues' and a commitment to rooting Labour political loyalities exclusively through an identification with the traditional culture of the Left.

'Some version of the London "loony Left" ideological missile is at this very moment cruising up the M1'



Brenda Prince/Format

Labour's future?

This was the image with which Labour chose to engage, ideologically, with Thatcherism. The key question is, can Labour win with it? Can it harness the fragmented experiences of living in Great Britain Limited to a new, radical, political will? Can it construct around Labour a new social bloc?

Of course, millions of people desperately need the welfare state. And identification with parts of it remains strong. So, in some areas, the traditionalist appeal did lend conviction to Labour's programme. It also contained an element of forward-projection – in the form of the question 'what sort of society would you prefer to live in?'

On the other hand, it was also fatally narrow and backward-looking. It does not have roots in the things which are transforming social and economic life and it lacks a convincing strategy for, or image of, modernisation. Labour may have carried conviction on the 'fair shares', redistribution, front; but it lacked credibility on the 'wealth-creating' front. It could not construct a picture of what a wealthy *society* might be like or how it could be created. And since many identifications were made, not in terms of social wealth but in 'family fortunes', it had no image to set against Thatcherism's image of personalised and privatised 'prosperity'.

The sober truth is that Labour probably did as well with this traditionalist image as it was possible to do. It does not and cannot carry majority support. It appeals to some sectors of, but cannot unify, the working class. And it certainly is not hegemonic enough to construct out of our increasingly fragmented and divided society a new social bloc or collective political will for the future.

In the aftermath of the election, many people have been seeking consolation in the belief that the appeal to the 'traditional Labour voter' could, at least, carry half the country – the 'North'. The 'North' has become a sort of geographical metaphor for where the traditional Labour voter now resides. If only things were so neatly divided, Labour's traditionalist appeal would make more sense. But, unfortunately, that story is deceptively neat.

The 'North' is not just a geographical entity: it is also a state of mind. Looked at in this way, the picture becomes a good deal bleaker.

First, the 'North' is not as solid as it looks. There are plenty of 'South-minded' working-class people living in the 'North'.

Second, the disaster which Labour suffered in London and the South East suggests that many people there who may be 'North' in their living standards, conditions and even origins have, nevertheless, become 'Southerners' in their heads. The 'new' working class in the geographical 'South' now identify and vote in a majority for Thatcherism. They no longer identify themselves with Labour's traditional working class Labour voter. What is more, many people in the underclasses – the unskilled, part-timers, young unemployed, women living alone, black people, the homeless, inner-city casualities – don't see themselves or identify with this traditionalist image either. Looked at, not so much in terms of economic class, but as ideological identification, Labour could not and cannot for the foreseeable future make any inroads into the social landscape of the 'South' on the narrow basis of the image they chose.

Third, the 'North' is not impervious to Thatcherite inroads as we shall see in the coming months. The inner-cities strategy will not bring about long-term sustained growth in the 'North', but it is going to erode Labour's political base in the great industrial urban areas. Thatcherism in the 'South' has already had considerable success in targeting the big-spending Labour councils, the comprehensive schools and council housing – three major pillars of Labour's political base. In the next months we are going to witness a similar assult, economically and ideologically, on Labour's base in the 'North', with blistering effects.

There will be a flood of small businesses, pump-primed, by industrialists who know on which side their political bread is buttered. The press will trumpet its immediate 'success' and Lord Young will be 'economical' with more statistics. Labour authorities will be side-lined by 'alternative' private channels of growth, and isolated for attack (some version of the London 'loony Left' ideological missile is at this very moment cruising up the M1). Thatcherism can't 'restore' Britain's old industrial base – but that is not the project. It may not be able to positively win over everybody – but that is not necessary either. It has never had an overwhelming social majority on anything. But it can mobilise the crucial two-thirds, which is enough. Not all of them are, as yet, Tory voters, but many who still vote Labour or Alliance have begun to benefit from Thatcherism, or are making pragmatic adjustments to it.

What's more, not all the two-thirds needs to be in any real sense 'prosperous'. All Thatcherism has to do to erode Labour's 'Northern' bastions is to lay a base for *just enough* people to put their feet, tentatively, on the new Thatcherite ladders of success. Firstly, it has to convince them that, concretely, this is a more likely way to a better, more prosperous life than any other alternative on offer. Secondly, it has to convince others who have not yet begun to do well, to cast their lot in with the free-market society. Once this threshold has been crossed, a much larger number – a strategic majority, the necessary two-thirds – move in their heads. The balance shifts. The 'North' has begun its symbolic journey 'Southwards'...

What, then, about the possibility of constructing the different social constituencies into a new social bloc around Labour's traditionalist appeal? Clearly, few modernising industrialists can be harnessed to Labour's current strategy. Big business is now pro-Thatcher, not

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simply in pragmatic but in ideological terms. They 'believe'. They understand that Thatcherism is not just a strategy which favours capital; it must also be a strategy for the whole society, 'for capital'. The middle classes are interestingly split. The self-made middle classes – numerically, the overwhelming majority – who inhabit the culture of the private sector, are Mrs Thatcher's ideological vanguard. They have talked their way into an impregnable philosophy of 'number one'. The 'public sector' middle classes in education, local government or the social services are not so directly in touch with the new prosperity and are more inclined to seek rewards from socially useful and personally rewarding forms of work which have been brutally savaged by the new criteria of 'value-for-money' and 'efficiency'. They are more detached from Thatcherism. But this does not help Labour as much as it might, since the Alliance now soaks up their disenchantment with Thatcherism – it's a 'nicer' option.

In the aftermath of the election, many people on the Left are arguing that Labour's only hope lies in the working class. However, Thatcherism's electoral hegemony continues to rest precisely on certain parts of the working class vote. Where Labour commands a majority, that majority is overwhelmingly working class. But the working class is not overwhelmingly Labour. Indeed, there is no such thing as 'the' working class vote any more. Divisions, not solidarities, of class identification are the rule. There are large and significant sectors of the 'working class' as it really is today – the unemployed, semi-skilled and unskilled, part-time workers, male and female, the low-paid, black people, the 'underclasses' of Thatcherite Britain – who no longer see themselves in a traditional Labour way. In Greater London and the South East, Labour failed to connect with the forces that are remaking the working class. Skilled workers in the new industries, and the expanding clerical and office workforce, are, in their majority, voters for Thatcherism. There are more of them in the South East than in the North, but the balance is changing and will continue, unevenly, to do so. The sectors of this vote who are home owners or new shareholders are even more committed.

What then of the new social constituencies which, in any case, have less of a clear-cut class identity? Women, whether in or out of full-time work, did *not* vote overwhelmingly for Thatcherism and have not done so since 1979. But Labour made absolutely no direct, strategic or distinctive investment in what, from any point of view, is a historic shift of political identification. Presumably, on the analogy with 'black sections', to do so would be 'sexist'! By the same token, the 'ethnic' vote is less and less a Labour possession – and, after the disastrous handling of the black sections issue, who can blame them? More owners of Asian small businesses are beginning to vote by class rather than by race. A proportion of Afro-Caribbean people will not be far behind.

'What the election suggests is that Labour far from opening the hard road to renewal, largely turned its back on it'

None of this augurs well for the future. Politics does not reflect majorities, it constructs them. And there is no evidence that Labour's commitment to traditionalism can construct such a majority. Certainly, the consequences of Thatcherite restructuring are horrendous. But larger and larger numbers of people no longer experience all this as 'traditional Labour voters'. Even less can they articulate their aspirations through the traditional Labour image. The question of Labour becoming in a deep sense the majority party of society is therefore not whether it can rally and mobilise its past, but whether it has a convincing alternative scenario to Thatcherism for the future. It cannot build such an alternative by, however honourably, replaying '1945' in 1987. It can only honour its past by aiming to move forwards. But to do so it needs a strategy for modernisation and an image of modernity. What the election suggests is that Labour far from opening the hard road to renewal, largely turned its back on it. It is therefore not surprising that – despite the good feelings and high morale – its historic decline continues. ●

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Royal appointment: Rod Hackney (left) and Prince Charles

From The Ground Up

Architect Rod Hackney has almost single handedly made 'community architecture' a household term. Best known for his influence on the Prince of Wales, Hackney has upset both the architectural establishment at the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and many architects working with community groups who feel he has hijacked community architecture for his own ends. This month Hackney becomes RIBA president. Jos Boys talked to him at his Cheshire practice.

The RIBA is very much an establishment body and you've definitely shaken it up. Why did you want to be president?
It offers a number of challenges. The architectural profession in this country has suffered a generally bad press, partly because of the creations of some of its members. Inner city problems continue to grow and the areas of greatest stress are identified with industrialised building techniques. So it needs marketing to show that architects have today changed tack – I believe they are much better now.

The RIBA will be making more of this in the future. We can't just sit in an ivory tower and expect products to be heralded to the sky without a proper explanation of what they are about. There are many types of architects. We don't need this stress on the products of one or two well-known ones. So I'll be looking for a change of emphasis, better communication, and a more labour intensive approach – more time with people who use buildings.

Your name is synonymous with what you've called community architecture. There has been a radical movement among architects since the 1970s to work much more directly with the community and to involve ordinary people in designing their own housing and environments. You are now probably the best known exponent of these new approaches. Can you explain what *you* mean by community architcture?
Community involvement is user involvement. We live and work with the tenants. They come and ask us everything including how to fill in social security forms, because they can see us ploughing through bureaucracy.

In what ways do people become involved with the actual designing of their housing? And what is the architect's role?
In some schemes people design the buildings – in some they build them. We act as referee between tenants and as co-ordinators.

Your critics say you only allow user participation, not user control. This means that a future occupant may be able to make a choice between a limited range of options – say of window types or room sizes, but would not be involved in the initial design process, deciding what these options could be.
No it's not about options. We don't know what we are going to do until we start.

The housing scheme you are currently working on, in Macclesfield, is a design and build scheme for owner-occupation. How much choice do occupiers have here?
It depends on circumstances. In Macclesfield, where unemployment stands at 7%, there is enough affluence to allow people to pay builders wages. And having created building jobs within the community from Black Road (the neighbouring street rehabilitated by Hackney in the 1970s) we can keep those jobs and use those builders. On a similar scheme in Stirling where unemployment is much higher almost all the houses are self built.

The houses in this Macclesfield scheme are actually very similar to look at – with leaded window panes for example. They all look the same...
Yes standardisation of components for cost savings is important.

They are designed in that cottagey style that most architects loathe.
We've won architectural awards for these schemes – although they always stress it's for the process and not the product. Architecture is not about having a photogenic end product.

Do you think there is such a thing as good design? Do users need to be educated to appreciate it?
In Denmark, for example, people are much closer to nature even in the cities and understand good design based on natural colours and materials. But here, with the increased use of specialists, people have lost that ability.

Architects may say you are appealing to the lowest common denominator in the styles that you end up promoting.
There is still room for one-off designs such as those for corporate clients who want to show off their status.

But only for those who can afford prestige projects? With housing it's the process and not the product that counts?
Yes.

What about user participation in non-housing schemes, or in schemes where you don't know who the occupant is going to be?
We're expanding user participation into other areas. In Burnley, we're providing new industrial workshops next to an inner city housing rehabilitation scheme so that tenants don't have to rent out-of-town workshops on new industrial estates.

Do you do work without user participation?
Yes to make enought profit to support the community architecture approach. I believe too many architects rely on public subsidies to survive.

Do you approve of public funding – Urban programme money and the like?
Yes, certainly from housing improvement grants because they have stopped the demolition of old houses and allowed community architecture groups to expand, and because it has meant that more architects have had to adjust to new ways of working.

Your critics suggest you in-

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vented community architecture mainly as an entrepreneur – because you saw it as an expanding area for making money.

Then my critics think I had more control than I had. I got into it by accident. I bought a house in Macclesfield for £1,000 when I was writing my PhD. After about a month someone came and asked me to help them with their house. It started from there.

What would you like to be doing in 10 years time?

Well, we became developers five years ago, builders four years ago, speculative developers three years ago, we did workshops last year and this year we are building castles...

Castles?

Well we had a lot of old stone and these people wanted something different.

Wealthy clients' houses then.

Yes.

You support owner occupation rather than any kind of public ownership?

Yes. It enables people to accumulate, but it also localises that wealth.

What about areas where these working class owners cannot sell – where house prices are depressed by mass unemployment?

This is an exception rather than a rule. In Stirling, for example, the private sector wouldn't build and the local authority couldn't build because it is rate capped. So building land is worth next to nothing and houses that cost £26,000 to build can only sell for £18,000. In doing the self-build scheme there, we are creating a new market locally. Houses are now being built for between £13,000 and £22,000 and already house prices in the area are picking up.

How would you place yourself politically?

I don't. Housing comes above politics. Self-help appeals from right to left – it can be individualist or collective. We do a scheme in a Tory area and the local councillor celebrates individuals helping themselves. We do a scheme in a Labour area and the local councillor celebrates the strength of working class people. Similarly some schemes involve people out of self interest. Others use their collective strength to get things done – to be taken notice of.

And what about money?

It doesn't matter where the money comes from. Either it comes from taxes for public sector programmes or from pre-tax sources in the City. But money is not the most important thing, it's also the process of new involvement. Throw money at the housing problem and people just become passive consumers of a product; it all becomes a matter of quantity and that means lack of individual control.

You're considered very ambitious – over ambitious perhaps?

What's over ambitious?

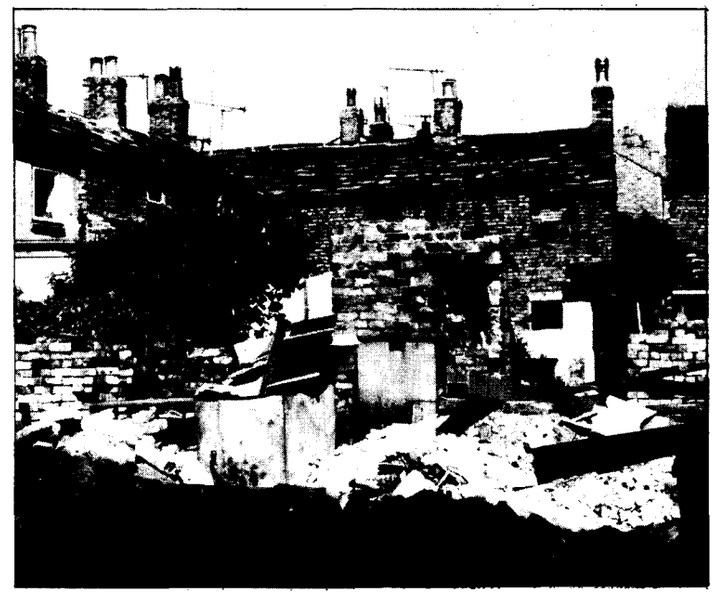
You made a successful bid to become president of the RIBA despite considerable establishment opposition and to top that with the presidency of the Union of International Architects (UIA) against similar opposition. Then there's your well-publicised association with the Prince of Wales. I mean personal ambition, self-promotion.

People seem to try and put more in to what I do than is there. I just stumble from one thing to another. But I have also got my feet firmly on the ground because it's not just me – there is control. The control is the people we're working for on any housing schemes. And, they are just five minutes away if they want to complain about something.

You must have dreams, things you still want to do.

To get rid of the housing problem. I think that architects do have a vision – that out of destruction they can make a gem. It's the getting there that's difficult, carrying people with you. To be truthful I much prefer an honest enemy who says they are going to stop you, than someone who says they'll help and then ditches you halfway through. That is worse than no help at all.

Why should people want to stop you?



Before and after: The Macclesfield housing improvement scheme

They know my reputation for not letting go until I succeed. People say that I'm too single minded. With the building communities conference we had a picket by tenants and community groups because money came from private sponsors. I got them to come in and speak and then I got complaints for the sponsors because of that. I don't mind that. You've got to go to the people with the cash to sell community architecture because it is about people who are poor.

Is it all about marketing then?

Yes, community architecture *is* about marketing – marketing an alternative product where up to a few years ago the only answer to the housing problem was seen to be large-scale redevelopment.

You are not well-liked either by the architectural establishment or by many more explicitly left-wing architects working within the community technical aid movement.

The day I am well liked is the day I become ineffectual. ●

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Drama in a 1984 Jasinski production

The Drama of Poland

In the centre of Warsaw, nestled within that monument to Stalinism's bad taste, the Palace of Culture and Science, two theatre companies, Teatr Dramatyczny and Studio Theatre, sum up the two great Polish theatre traditions. For years Studio, directed by sculptor Josef Szajna, housed much of the best of the Polish avant-garde – a tradition which led the world in the 1970s. Facing it, separated by the massed statues of nameless worker-heroes, Dramatyczny performed the great Polish romantic authors.

Today both theatres seem lifeless and unimportant – not unlike theatres across the world. But the difference is that until recently Polish theatre seemed very important indeed. The traditional romantic theatre has always played a major role in Polish national affairs. Through centuries of occupation performances of work by national poet Mickiewicz have sparked riots and revolts. In the 1960s and 70s the avant-garde fuelled national pride in a very different way. By largely dispensing with words and creating a theatre of tortured imagery, artists such as Szajna and Tadeusz Kantor cornered a worldwide reputation. State subsidy was poured into these prestigious experiments. When national crisis came along the theatre was expected to play an important role, nationally and internationally. The lessons of how it fared are important for anyone with claims to engage in radical cultural practice.

The famous avant-garde figures largely fell silent during the years of Solidarity and martial law. Their work had a tradition of subversiveness, but in a subtle, multi-faceted way – directed at least as much against the church and the materialist West as against the state. Their sceptical pessimism hardly matched the passionate times. The traditional theatre provided a better response. Famous actors would throw political asides into romantic soliloquies and curtain calls would lead to speeches. With the mass media shackled by martial law these theatres could become, like the churches, uncontrollable centres of protest.

Faced with this strange reversal – the traditional companies having become the more radical voices – many small independent companies found themselves having to make decisions. These companies – largely grown up from the student movements of the 1960s – could follow their artistic heroes into avant-garde equivocation, or follow their political instincts towards speech-making. The implications for state funding and public popularity were considerable – and probably contradictory.

Two companies in particular illustrate the choices and the lessons: Theatre of the Eighth Day and Teatr Stu were perhaps the two best groups to emerge from the 1960s. In the Polish crisis of the 1980s they followed opposite paths. Eighth Day dived wholeheartedly into politics – eventually managing to get banned in 1984 after an anti-Soviet play about the poet Mandelstam, victim of Stalin's purges. Stu, on the other hand, took an apolitical road – maintaining an intellectual, 'European' outlook in their work. Both companies have benefited from these choices: Eighth Day, though no longer officially in existence, have become highly popular at international festivals under the easy Western label – 'much-banned'; Stu have secured greater state subsidy and a theatre in Krakow. Both companies have, however, faced criticism within Poland for their responses to the crisis – Eighth Day are felt to have degenerated into agit-prop, Stu are thought to have lost any relevance. Theatre is felt to have failed the people.

Krysztof Jasinski, director of Teatr Stu, accepts the criticisms: 'the Solidarity movement was a shock throughout Polish culture', he says in his Krakow rehearsal rooms. 'Suddenly the street was more dramatic than the stage. Theatre failed to find ways to articulate this and the result was paralysis'.

Solidarity's politics offered a rejection of 'mass' terms in favour of local actions. The mass media were boycotted, but theatre – potentially the local, public art – failed to find a response any better than sloganeering. To Jasinski this was a disaster – as much ultimately for traditional theatre as for the avant-garde, and as much for Eighth Day as for Stu: 'I can't agree with what Eighth Day did. They made everything black and white. They said "Let's hate the Russians". That's the easy way of diverting people's attention: in the 50s we were told to hate the intellectuals, in the 60s it was the Jews again, now it's the Russians – it comes down to the same thing, even if it's different people saying it.'

With the collapse of Solidarity the theatres now seem deadened – the avant-garde experiment looks dated and irrelevant, the speech makers have little left to say. But theatre remains important in Poland – even as a barometer of depression – and Jasinski is full of hope: the lesson learnt, he feels, is that Polish theatre must rediscover the romantic tradition, but developing its contemporary relevance, with particular concentration on two fields – the importance of the individual and the importance of writing.

Doesn't this go against the whole modern Polish theatre movement? 'Visual theatre had its moment', says Jasinski in reply. 'But the main concentration here is on theatre of the word. I'm more interested in evolution than in shattering to pieces, and in what I as a Pole can do in the name of humanity and myself. I think that the Polish romantic and neo-romantic traditions have solutions to these problems. These new times we are entering will create a new theatre, a theatre which expresses the new man.' ●

John McGrath, Irek Szkamruk

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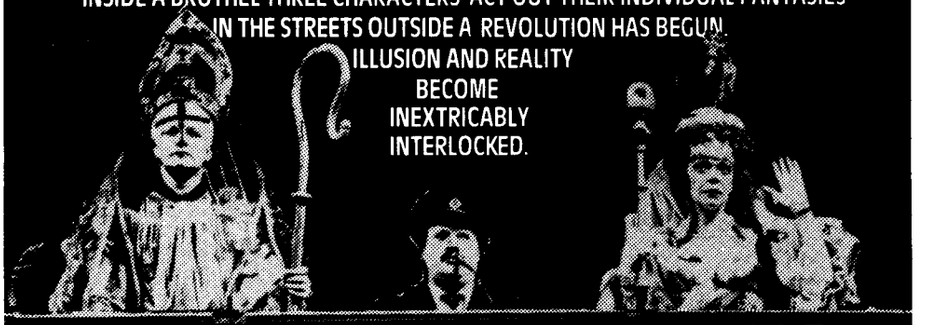

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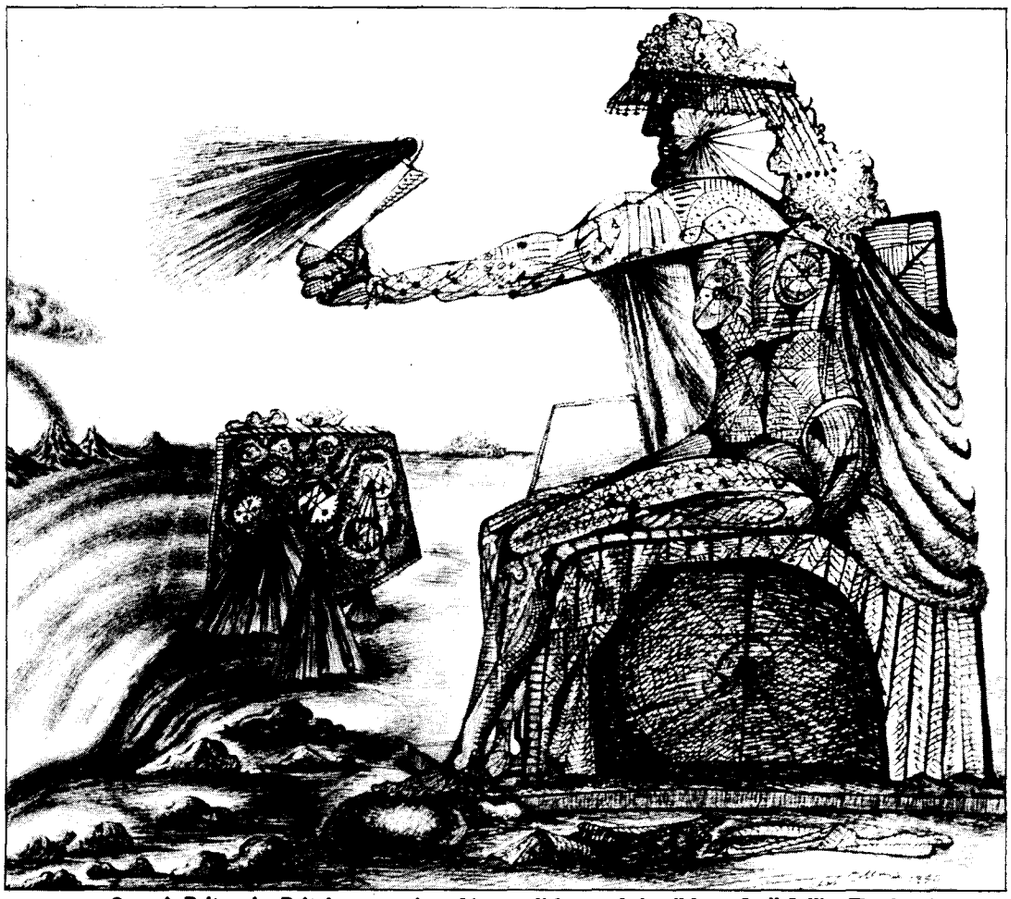

Organic Britannia: Britain as a nation of 'natural' forms. A detail from Cecil Collins The Oracle

National Fantasies

The revival of interest in British 20th century Romanticism, indicated by the extensive exhibition now at the Barbican Gallery (until July 19th), occurs at an interesting moment, in view of the Right's new project to revivify 'national pride' while simultaneously dismantling socialism as a doctrine 'foreign to our nature'. *A Paradise Lost*, a celebration of the neo-Romantic imagination in Britain between 1935 and 1955, reveals how central that imagination was in defining and sustaining an ideology of national cultural identity, rooted in a mythic national past and in the native British landscape, at a time when that identity was perceived to be most seriously in danger. Britain was literally *re-drawn* at this time as a fantasy island, a paradise garden or 'other Eden'. But dreams of a lost Golden Age, in which class politics are effaced by a desired return to a pre-industrial order, quickly turn into nightmares. It is images of disease and decay which predominate in this intriguing but finally depressingly regressive exhibition. ●

Joanna Coakley

Estate Drama

One of America's most notorious housing estates seems an unlikely backdrop for a flourishing theatre project. But Chicago's Cabrini Green, which tops the statistics for violence, poverty and poor maintenance, has just given birth to a radical new venture PROJECT, which is visiting Britain this month, as part of the London International Festival of Theatre.

Staged by the Chicago Free Street Theater, PROJECT is a musical documentary based on a series of video interviews with local residents about life on the Green. They include the woman who is regularly late for work because she can't leave her flat until the shooting has stopped outside, and who comments wryly: 'Bullets got no eyes for seeing'. And the young man who has to give a fake address at job interviews because to admit that he lives on the Green is like admitting to social leprosy.

PROJECT is an inspiring example of the relevance of community theatre. It has provided Cabrini Green with a voice, and it has furnished its residents with a vital arena in which to explore and to understand their problems.

It is therefore apt that its first performances in Britain will be in the London borough of Newham, the second poorest in the country, and one which suffers from a similar housing crisis. The cast also intends to hold workshops with local people in the hopes of fostering a similar venture over here. ●

Rowena Chapman

Skin and Coal

Recent years have seen an upsurge of independent black documentary film making, which has sought to reconstruct the history of black presence in Britain. *Skin and Coal* is a 60 minute film essay made by Social Film and Video, a London based black independent film company. It documents the 'story', through interviews, of a span of two generations of black miners and their families in Doncaster, Leeds and Nottingham.

Unlike most documentaries about the 'miners' this film takes a group of black miners as the central subject and does not present them as a 'problem'. The first generation of black miners describe the ways in which the 1947 foreign labour ruling, which barred migrant workers in the union rule book, was used to operate the 'colour bar' in some areas as late as 1977.

For the second generation of young black miners the situation, although connected, is different. They argue that white authority makes itself most strongly felt outside the pit. The white wife of a black miner, for example, whose white son was picked on by teachers when they found out his step-dad was black says, 'As the wife of a black miner I don't have a different life. But as the wife of a black man things are different.' One disappointment is the absence of any discussion or mention of black miners' involvement in the miners' strike. The film, will be screened at the Bijou Cinema and the Rio, in London. Phone Errol Dunne on 01 241 2831 for details.●

George Shire

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Simon Julliard

The necessities of hippie life

Hippie Days Are Here Again

We seem to be in the midst of a love affair with those happy hippie days of the summer of 67. Is this simply a clever marketing scheme for selling the CD version of 'Sergeant Pepper'? Or is there a more enduring legacy from that period?

The mystical approach of the hippies came from a milieu that had never previously entered, on any mass level, into the cultural language of Western society. The quest for freedom, and 'wholeness', although based on the individual rather than on the collective, has exerted a powerful legacy.

One only has to walk down the streets of almost any town in Britain to find evidence that the hippie legacy is still very much with us. It is thanks to the hippies that we have a legitimate place on the high street for health food stores and whole food restaurants. Britain's growing use of alternative medicine shares the same legacy. Every year over 1m people regularly visit practitioners ranging from osteopaths, herbalists and homeopaths to those with more esoteric skills.

The 'New Age' movement has also taken up some hippie themes. This encompasses the fight to save whales and rain forests, the use of alternative or healing arts, and concern about humanity's relationship to the planet.

This is not simply lifestyle trends repeating themselves. The hippies of the 60s were almost uniformly under 35, and maintained styles which indicated the degrees to which they had 'dropped' out, into a distinctly alternative world. By contrast those involved in the movements that have drawn on the hippie legacy are as likely to be found wearing business suits as kaftans.

There is still a desire to achieve some lasting impact on a planet that is in a far more critical state than it was 20 years ago today.●

Brian Hipkin

Latin Sounds

Latin and latin-based music is gaining ground in popularity in Britain these days, mostly under the name of Salsa. We asked Sue Steward, music writer, DJ and specialist in latin sound, to take us through the vast array of artists and records now available.

The vogue in the last few years was for latin jazz. **Giles Peterson,** a Radio London DJ, put together a series for Sttreetsounds Records, *Jazz Dances*, which is a great introduction to this style of latin jazz cross-over.

This year's vogue is for latin soul, a style which was very popular in the 60s in New York, with Puerto Rican singers singing in a kind of mock English. It is a blending of R&B with Mambo – a really tough city sound which is also very soulful. London DJ **Dave Hucker** put together a compilation, *We Got Latin Soul* which has just come out on the Charlie label. *NME* have done a cassette, *The Latin Kick*, which you can get through their mail order. This includes a whole wide range of latin music and some straight jazz with a latin bias, but also features **Ray Barreto** and **Tito Puente** who are strictly in the latin world.

Globe Style records have issued *Oye Listen*, a compilation mostly of the top sounds of New York. This is a very modern sound, no looking back to the past or sentimentalising. Also in their series is the *Super Allstars*, a compilation of mostly Cuban songs that have been given a modern treatment.

The first compilation of latin music was on the Earthworks label. Their *Viva El Ritmo – Cuba Baila* is a collection of all kinds of different dance music from Cuba, and reflects developments in Cuba since the revolution. Earthworks has just done a deal with Virgin Records to put out a whole series of Cuban records and latin music from New York, so keep an eye open for this.

Any of the records of **Tito Puente,** on Concord Picant label, are worth picking up. His latin ensemble are very skilful players, with some jazz standards which would be recognisable from the 40s and 50s. But there are also his own compositions which are more modern, and more latin based.

Machito is the granpappy of the whole of latin jazz. Go for any of his records. He always has guests playing like **Charlie Parker, Howard McGee, Milk Jackson,** and there is always a good mixutre of straight jazz solos and really vibrant Cuban percussion.

The records of **Mongo Santamaria** and **Ray Barreto,** are worth listening to, reflecting their mixed careers in straight jazz and popular dance music.

Merengue is another style of music loosely under the heading of Salsa. The style is based in the Dominican Republic and has its own hierarchy of stars. I would recommend **Wilfredo Vargas,** a young and very energetic player, especially his album *El Jardinero;* and **Johnny Ventura,** the so-called king of Merengue.

We should not forget Salsa proper, which is the big brash New York style, packed with horns and voices, and a central plug of percussion. In the 70s the best, most progressive, and most influential of Salsa was produced by the Fania Records label. Their catalogue is now available here through Virgin shops, HMV, and specialist shops in London like Stterns African Record Centre, Honest Johns or Rhythm Records. Fania is a mixture of Puerto Rican and Cuban and includes names like **Ray Barreto, Larry Harlow, Johnny Pacheco, Willie Colon** and **Ruben Blades.** Try any of their compilations.

Almost all the Fania compilations feature the Cuban singer **Celia Cruz,** the only woman of note working in Salsa today. She used to sing with a big band called **Sonora Matancera** pure Cuban music from the 50s. On records of that time you will find her singing rumba and mambo with her voice still young and rich and deep. From the 60s you can pick up records she made with **Tito Puente,** and in the 70s she made a record with **Johnny Pacheco** called *Celia y Johnny*. She is coming to London with **Tito Puente** to play at Hammersmith Palais on July 12, so try to see her in action. You will become addicted.

Finally a mention must be made of **Willie Colon,** who is part of a new movement blending latin music with black American Hip Hop. He has a couple of 12-inch singles out, the latest of which is *She Don't Know I'm Alive*, which uses timbales and congas and all the percussion of latin music aginst the synthesisers in a Hip Hop format. There is a whole new stream of these productions. This is the future entry of latin music into the mainstream in America. ●

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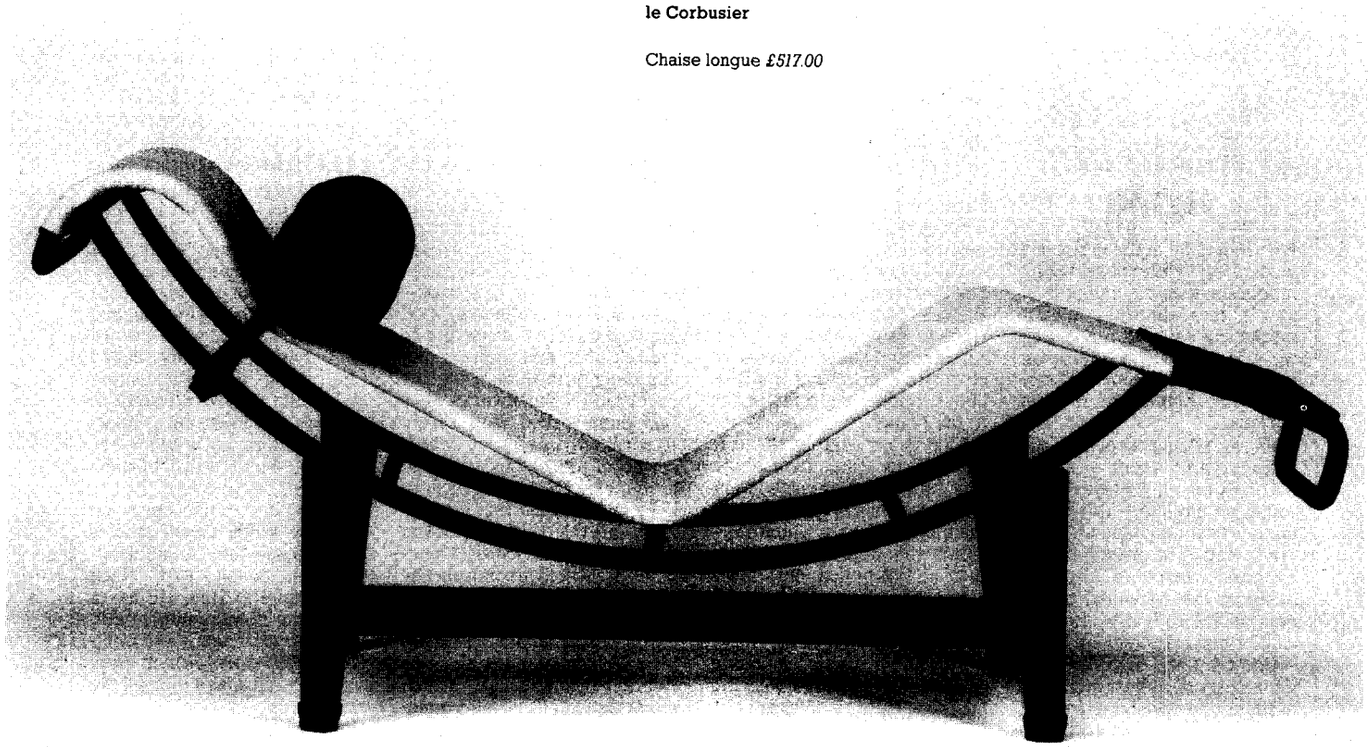

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Telling Tales

The Rat
Günter Grass
Secker and Warburg £12.95

By the age of nineteen, Günter Grass had been a member of the Jungvolk, the Hitler Youth and the Wehrmacht; he had been wounded in action, captured by the Americans, and imprisoned in a POW camp. And yet his conscience was untroubled until the day when, together with his fellow POWs, he was taken to see the concentration camp at Dachau. He was incredulous – surely the evidence had been faked by the Allies to discredit the defeated enemy? It was only when he heard German radio reporters discussing Nazi war crimes at the Nüremberg Trials that the truth sank in.

This experience more than any other formed the basis for Grass's remarkable writing mission – probing, snuffling out, worrying away at the past, subjecting post-war German history to the most unrelenting and critical examination. Seeing that the language had been corrupted and sullied by Nazism, he invented a new German, daring in its originality, and through myth and fable he laid bare Germany's past for close scrutiny, so that the same mistakes could never be made again. His prodigiously fertile imagination has given us a host of brilliantly memorable characters: little Oskar in **The Tin Drum,** whose stubborn refusal to grow up allows Grass to be extremely funny about Nazi Germany without seeming at all flippant; Mahlke, the serious clown from **Cat and Mouse** who, when transformed from an object of ridicule into everyone's hero, refuses to conform to the heroic image; Amsel, the half-Jewish maker of scarecrows from **Dog Years** and his protector Matern who alternately despises and envies his friend's superior talents.

Although Grass's powers of invention have rarely failed him, he has often allowed his experiments with structural innovation and the need to get his political message across to damage his work. **The Tin Drum** should have ended at the end of the war. Grass, however, was determined to expose the hypocrisy of his compatriots who wanted to assume that the new constitution had banished the evil of fascism, and the narrative was allowed to continue to show that little, if anything, had changed, much to the detriment of the book. Similarly, while **The Flounder** spanned the whole of human history in an attempt to give it a feminist gloss, the novel lacked a central, unifying theme, and in the end, the wise old fish became something of a bore.

In spite of these flaws, and the fact that he has never quite fulfilled his earlier promise, Günter Grass's reputation as one of the most ambitious and accomplished living novelists still stands untarnished. It remains to be seen whether that reputation can survive the publication of **The Rat.**

In his new novel, Grass tells us that he wanted to write a 'poem about the education of the human race', to point out to us the 'finality of our situation.' What is this dire situation we find ourselves in, about which the prophet feels constrained to warn us? That the world is in serious danger and that humanity may be careering headlong towards its end. The problem with this as a subject for a novel is not that it is too vast, but that it is too banal. Throughout each of the twelve chapters the reader is painfully aware, not of 'the race against time, to say and to hear what needs to be said', but of the frantic exertions of the author as he tries to live up to his national, if not his universal, responsibility as the Man with Something Important to Say. But there is nothing to say – or certainly not enough to fill 360-odd-pages-worth of novel. What there is, in terms of dark prophecies and dire warnings, might make the subject of an hour-long television documentary, or a pull-out feature in one of the quality newspapers. But most disappointing of all, there is no story to tell.

Initially, this absence of a story is obscured by the layering of four separate strands of fiction, any one of which appears capable of leading an existence independent of the others and yet each of which is curiously inconclusive and unsatisfying in its meanderings. There is no lack of events, of wonderfully Grassian inventions; indeed, these follow in such quick succession that the reader is left gasping for breath. Yet this glut is not indicative of richness and abundance of ideas, but betrays a weakness; no sooner does one motif appear and fail in its task than it is replaced by another. The rat of the title is both the narrator's Christmas present and the great she-rat who comes to him in dreams, and lectures him on, among other things, the importance of ratkind in world history, the imminent demise of man (which could have been avoided if only he'd been more kind to rats) and the coming of a new race of rat-people, who rejoice in the name of Watsoncricks.

In addition we are asked to follow the adventures of five women-in-the-prime-of-life sailing around the Baltic in a converted barge, ostensibly measuring pollution by counting jellyfish, but really in search of the lost land of Vineta, a sort of Atlantis. And we are instructed in what *really* happened in Hamelin when the Pied Piper came to town (clue: the rats got a bad press). In between times, we follow the life of Lothar Malskat, the forger of Gothic frescos in Lübeck Cathedral, and are invited to compare him with Adenauer and Ulbricht, leaders of the two post-war Germanys. Grass lumps the three of them together as the 'Masterforgers of the Fifties' – a superficially attractive, if politically mundane contention. And because the forests are being destroyed by acid rain, assorted fairy-tale characters get together and form a pressure group; the Chancellor's children turn into Hansel and Gretel, join the group, and together they succeed in getting the brothers Grimm appointed to the ministry of the environment – but not for long. Throughout these scenes the imagery, by Grass's standards, is flat and the irony is heavy-handed.

Most serious of all is Grass's attempt to resurrect his most famous character, Oskar Mazerath. This Oskar has little in common with the magical boy from **The Tin Drum:** he is nearing sixty, and has become a movie mogul, reappearing to make a video of the coming end of the world. The sense of embarrassment at the author's attempt to justify this pilfering of his own past is only accentuated by Oskar's introduction: 'Someone wants to be greeted. Someone introduces himself as an old friend and claims that he still exists. He wants to make a comeback. All right, let him.' Yet more characters from Grass's Baltic stockpot make brief sorties: Anna Koljaiczek is there, Tulla Pokriefke pops up briefly, and the flounder makes regular appearances to our Atlantis-seeking seafarers. The strands occasionally entwine, then separate again, but nowhere is there a sense of cohesion, or even the sense that, if there were a sense of cohesion, things would be any better.

The feeling that this is not the Grass we know is strengthened by the one or two passages in the book where the prose sparkles and the wit flows: the hilarious episode of Grandmother Koljaiczek's 107th birthday, and the detailed description of Oskar's physical indisposition, for example. Unfortunately, most readers will not get this far – they will have long since given up in despair. The few who, out of loyalty or love, persevere till the end will get little reward for their efforts. For this is a deeply depressing book, both in its message of resignation and hopelessness, and in its depiction of a storyteller who has run out of tales to tell. ●

Piers Spence

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BOOKS

Doubtful Benefits

Training Without Jobs: New Deals and Broken Promises
Dan Finn
Macmillan £1.95

One of the Tories' greatest successes has been their take-over of moral authority on the subject of education, training and the relationship of school to work. In the early 70s the Right caught the Left on the wrong foot in this area of policy. By the late 70s, with the fiasco of the 'Great Debate', they had hypnotised the Labour Party into shooting itself in the said foot. In **Training Without Jobs**, Dan Finn traces the painful history of Tory and Labour policies for the handling of 'surplus' young people – from the raising of the school leaving age in 1973 to the launch of the Youth Training Scheme ten years later.

In this period the Manpower Services Commission was transfigured from a humble agency on a budget of £1.25m to a para-ministry spending two thousand times that much. Though it was officially only a 'quango', for those who received the doubtful benefit of its programmes the MSC became undeniably the state. Though youth was never its sole concern, the MSC became *the* state agency for controlling the young and the youth labour market.

Every school leaver knows that YOP, YTS and all those other schemes that are rushed into existence, knocked into shape, only to be replaced by the new improved model, are a government strategy for keeping young people out of the unemployment figures and reducing their expectations of proper paid work. Dan Finn argues further that they are also a labour *supply* strategy. The Conservatives portray the young as deficient in work skills. But for certain kinds of work employers positively relish unprotected and inexperienced youth labour. Finn points to the extensive experience a typical school child has of part-time underpaid work. The new youth policies he says, dressed up as rights and opportunities for young people, in reality create 'a particular kind of labour power which can be drawn on both while children are at school and in their early years on the labour market'.

The 1987 Tory manifesto left no doubt. YTS would become compulsory for the young unemployed: 'we will take steps to ensure that those under 18 who deliberately choose to remain unemployed are not eligible for benefit.' And without even the pretence of a wage the new Job Training Scheme proposes to 18-year olds that they contribute to some employer's labour force in exchange for nothing more than their existing supplementary benefit.

In comparison, the Labour Party response on education and training lacked colour. If Labour is to take back the initiative it has to add content to form. A truly socialist strategy would strengthen the powers of self-expression and resistance of 16 and 17-year-olds, rather than teaching them to submit more graciously to exploitation. The policy makers could usefully read Finn's book. ●

Cynthia Cockburn

Fertility Rites

Contraception. A Practical and Political Guide
Rose Shapiro
Virago £4.50

Many women will welcome a book which combines practical information on the different methods of birth control available, with information about the political context in which decisions about contraception are made.

The starting point for Shapiro's guide is that 'Contraception is not simply about avoiding conception: crucially it is also to do with sex, health and attitudes to reproduction . . .' The first part of the book, on the history of the birth control movement, the current battles about sexuality and reproduction and the politics of information is intended to be as much of a resource as the rest of the book which outlines in great detail the different methods of birth control available.

Certainly, it makes interesting reading. Freely available birth control was fought for and won in a context in which concerns about overpopulation and racial superiority played a major role. It was not simply feminists arguing that there could be no equality for women unless they had the right to choose when and whether to have children. The formidable role of the Christian church in its opposition to any form of contraceptive will be familiar to many people involved in more recent battles around abortion and the provision of contraceptive advice to young women under 16. What may be more surprising is that the medical establishment had little or nothing to do with the provision of birth control until the advent of the 'pill' in the 60s. The Family Planning Association then decided that this could only be prescribed by doctors.

The first part of the book is strongest when it discusses the choices available to women, and how these choices are presented. As Shapiro says, we use contraception in order to have sexual intercourse without getting pregnant. However, intercourse is usually seen by the providers of contraception as being all there is to sex and sexuality: the fact that intercourse doesn't have to be part of satisfying sex is never acknowledged, and is therefore not discussed when choices about contraception are made. As she points out, "Men who care" according to the FPA, "use the sheath" as if men have no choice or control over where they ejaculate. A man who cares might be equally well advised to come anywhere but in his partner's vagina, but no one dares subvert the natural order of sexual activity.'

This view, that sex begins with 'foreplay' and ends with intercourse, underpins contraception provision, along with the notion that once 'foreplay' begins we will be overcome with lust, lose all sense of responsibility, forget about contraception, and get pregnant! Therefore the best methods of contraception are those that we don't have to think about (IUDs, injectable contraceptives) or those that can be separated from sex (the pill). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the physically safest methods of birth control – barrier methods, with early abortion as a back up if the barrier fails (a 3% risk of accidental pregnancy) – are used by a minority of women.

The second half of the book is extremely detailed in its descriptions of the range of birth control methods on offer. However, its attempt to provide accurate information about all the methods on offer on an equal basis sits uneasily with the previous section which clearly outlines the different values that underpin and inform our choices about birth control. In this respect the structure used, which separates the 'politics' from the 'practice' works against Shapiro's stated aim of integrating both into one accessible guide. ●

Jan Mellor

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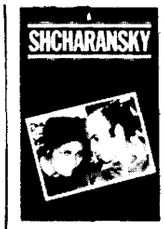

David and Goliath

Martin Gilbert's **Scharansky Hero of Our Time** *(Penguin £4.95)* has the dramatic appeal of a thriller. Gilbert traces the historical journey of Scharansky's dawning Jewish consciousness in the Six Day war, through his days as a refusenik, his long, farcical trial, and the torments of 12 years of exile and prison, to his release last year. What Gilbert reveals is an extraordinary survival story: Anatoly Scharansky's sentence was the longest given to a Jew since the death of Stalin.

Scharansky's personality comes across with great force. The diminutive man (Gilbert refers frequently to his size), with his love of the Psalms, is implicitly associated with a modern David conquering the Goliath of the post-Stalin state.

Gilbert exposes the surrealistic absurdity surrounding Scharansky. As a refusenik, KGB men were his continual companions; his 'tails' even shared his taxis. Scharansky demanded that since they were always with him, they should at least contribute to the taxi fare. They agreed to pay half.

Apart from showing Scharansky's sense of irony – when he met his wife Avital after 13 years separation he quipped 'Sorry I'm late' – Gilbert gives a picture of a man caught in a strange maze of Soviet doublethink regarding Jews. The USSR voted for a Jewish state in Palestine, yet when Scharansky attempted to obtain his exit visa it conjured up the relics of anti-semitism to turn public opinion against him. Gilbert links Scharansky's 'spy trial' directly to Dreyfus.

While Scharansky survived a heart condition, hunger strikes and prison beatings, Avital, who gained her exit visa the day they were married, campaigned ceaselessly for his release, securing support from thousands including George Marchais and Margaret Thatcher. Avital became an orthodox Jew in Israel, but Scharansky's Judaism stems from his socialist Zionism; he even learnt Arabic in prison. Since his release he has maintained his secular identity despite Avital's orthodoxy. That Scharansky endured his torture is a celebration of the human spirit. Where he stands in the next era of Jewish and Israeli history will make an even more exciting read. ●

Julia Pascal

Witty Women

As a young girl I was always aware of the different ways my parents made me laugh. My father told 'Jokes', while my mother would have me wetting myself as she described the long and tortuous journey she'd made to take a girdle back to the British Home Stores.

It is this difference in humour and comedy that *Morwenna Banks* and *Amanda Swift* explore in **The Jokes On Us** *(Pandora £5.95)*. Both authors have impressive comedy credits themselves; as writers and as performers. They are sharply aware that the word 'comedian' instantly produces an image of a *man* standing at a microphone; a double-take is needed if the comedian is a woman.

Through over 80 interviews with practitioners in the front line of comedy, they ask why this is so. Su Pollard (Peggy in Hi-Di-Hi) suggests that there are so few women in comedy because 'There aren't enough women who are prepared to look a prat'. There's an unwritten law that tells women never to appear stupid. And another which pushes women into predictable, and often crass, stereotypes – the brainless blonde or harping old bag.

But as Jenny LeCoat, a stand-up comedian, found out, it's difficult not to replace one stereotype with another. 'When I first started it was really cropped hair and bovver boots'. Later she realised she could be more challenging by 'softening down a bit . . . so that the men in the audience would not be able to dismiss me as a stroppy lesbian'.

If you feel in the mood for an intelligent look at women in comedy while having a good chortle, then **The Jokes On Us** is the book for you. ●

Tracy Brabin

Painful Memories

The Bad Box *(Virago £3.95)* is *Alison Fell's* third novel and her way of conceptualising those unpleasant childhood experiences and feelings over which none of us has any control and against whose deep injustices no redress is obtained. The novel is mainly autobiographical and relates the experience of growing up in rural Scotland in the late 50s and early 60s. The story is conducted on two levels, one of which is a mythological fantasy dreamed and written by the heroine, intruding into the main narrative from time to time and crashing through into reality near the end.

This is an uncomfortable novel packed with painful reminders – back-combed hair, waspie girdles, baby-doll pyjamas, persecution from gym and cookery teachers, and a wealth of adolescent cruelties peculiar to the 1950s. The pain is exacerbated by the overt sexism of Scottish society, brought out in dozens of different ways.

This is honestly done, for not many feminists who grew up in the 50s care to admit that the greatest source of oppression could be their own mothers and grandmothers.

The novel is compulsive reading for anyone who grew up in the 50s and is bound in time to graduate from *Virago's* New Fiction shelf to their Scottish Classics category. ●

Elspeth King

Family Entertainment

Micheline Wandor's **Look Back in Gender** *(Methuen £5.95)* examines post-war British drama from the standpoint of sexuality and the family. The title harks back deliberately to Osborne, a powerful and enduring influence, not least for his uncompromising stance on the censorship of 'Luther'. The book is presented as an evening at the theatre, with the abolition of censorship in 1968 as half-way mark.

Wandor reminds us that gender is not the prerogative of feminists, though they have enlightened us all as to its profound importance. Her conclusions are sobering indeed; although 1968 marked a watershed, liberating the style, content and even method of plays then written, there appears to have been since then a widening of the gap dividing the sexes.

Despite the burgeoning talent of female playwrights, the family now seems passé as a subject of serious contemplation. Even supposedly left-wing dramatists like Hare and Edgar remain incapable of according equal importance to female characters. Sadly, it is only in all-female plays that women are able to appear as the central subject.

All in all, this is an informative and valuable book. I only wish its scope could have encompassed 'popular' as well as 'high' art. Where would Ayckbourn fit, I wonder? ●

Betty Caplan

Visual Humour

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In April's Marxism Today, Ernesto Laclau argued that the working class could no longer be viewed as the fundamental agent of social change. Instead, he said, left-wing politics must be grounded on a new 'background image' – that of radical democracy. Here, Robin Blackburn and Jude Bloomfield open a discussion on the implications of his article.

Identity Crisis

Ernesto Laclau contends that class has become a minor factor in the formation of people's social identity compared with in Marx's day: instead of power being rooted in class, class is seen as only one historically specific form of power, which is no longer dominant. Although he does not give any explicit account of other sources of power, he implies that they are diverse and disconnected. He has thus moved away from his previous theory of politics as a struggle between the 'power bloc' and the 'people', in which diverse centres of power were unified into a cohesive whole by a dominant class which organised politically. This drew on Gramsci's concept of hegemony, where conflicting classes are transformed into contesting parties and ideologies, in the passage from the economic to the political sphere.

For Gramsci, class at the political level meant going beyond narrow class interest, to achieve a social vision with which a majority could identify. For the working class to be hegemonic it had to form permanent alliances, a 'historic bloc' which fused its concerns with those of the mass of the people. Thus, class concerns are transformed into popular democratic issues. The political language of a hegemonic working class should rightly be *social*ist, rather than expressed in terms of sectional class: it should present the broader social interest. For if class disappears from political thinking, popular aims become divorced from democratising economic power. This deprives democratic movements of the possibility of satisfying their material needs. New expressions of social identity, and the practical exercise of new rights, are also claims on resources.

Although all forms of power do not *originate* in the economic divisions of capitalism, they all *relate to it for their survival*. Therefore, we can only redistribute power of all kinds in our society if we also transform the system of production.

Reproduction – welfare, culture, ethnicity – are not questions only of subjective identity and discourse. Why have we failed in the women's liberation movement to win wider support among young women to pursue independent careers? Obviously, girls' lack of confidence and desire to be wives and mothers have played a part. These subjective factors result from the male power to define women. But this identity is enforced by depriving us of skills, representation, financial remuneration, and access to childcare. These would provide the material underpinning for new confidence and new identities, for economic and, therefore, greater emotional and psychological independence.

Laclau argues that work has become a lesser component of people's identity, but it remains a major determinant of the resources which people enjoy. The shift from manufacturing to services, and from manual to technical labour raises new problems of work control and autonomy, and the monitoring and uses of new technology against a dictatorial work regime. In Britain, these changes are creating a permanent divide between a core and periphery within the working class and a permanent ghetto of the unemployed. This requires a strategy for overcoming the division between part-time and full-time work, for applying new technology, to enhance work and improve services and products without simply displacing labour. We need a policy for unifying fragmented workforces.

Rather than class and work becoming marginal to politics, the failure to address the broad democratic issues of production and employment meant that trade unions in the 60s and 70s became hooked into narrow, corporate concerns and isolated from the wider community. Access to jobs, training, skills is the route to any kind of power or control over our lives. It is the main way of acquiring money and goods. But it also remains a central form of socialisation, learning not only how to do or make something but to relate to others and their needs: being a social being, not a lone individual.

While it is true that identity is more multi-faceted now than in the past, life chances are largely determined by class, as health statistics, mortality rates, life expectancy, testify. The food people eat, where they live, what they watch on TV, what newspapers they read, differ starkly according to class. Laclau is right to observe that people seem less and less to organise around class. However, he should also note the disparity between the massive role it plays in structuring people's lives and its minor political expression. Perhaps we should recognise struggles over resources, over hierarchies, over decision-making, as the practical, lived forms in which class power is also challenged.

The prospect of new and permanent social divisions highlights the serious problem for the Left of its political isolation from the working class. Whole neighbourhoods of the poor and unemployed remain without any links with the political organisations which once provided know-how, strength and political hope. The absence of the Left from the social life of ordinary people, the lack of common meeting places and a common culture has left us as outsiders, doing things 'on behalf of'.

In the absence of a theory of power, Laclau returns to the shopping list of social movements, lumping together single issue campaigns, local, national, short and long term struggles. This is just description. It cannot tell you which are strategic for the stability of the system, whether they have anything in common, or how they can be unified. The art of a new, socialist politics is to expand class politics from narrow trade unionism to broad popular politics, to cross-fertilise with all the oppressed. A starting point for the Left would be to overcome its separation from the majority of working class people – to use a political language which expresses ordinary people's desires and dreams and which, while rejecting their partial and discriminatory aspects, can translate them into realisable social goals. ●

Jude J Bloomfield

Illustration: Clifford Harper

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Class of 87

Ernesto Laclau believes that the proletariat is a spent force: in Marx's day the working class seemed a good candidate for overthrowing the established order, but the disorganising dynamic of capitalism, and the rise of the welfare state, have destroyed the proletarian identity. The working class no longer has a central role in promoting a 'universal' emancipation. Instead there must be pluralistic negotiation between the several social movements. 'Radical democracy' must become the new watchword.

Laclau asks rhetorically: 'Central role of the working class in the feminist struggle, in the ecological struggles, in the mobilisation of the marginalised sectors of the population of the decaying inner cities?'. This list strangely omits the struggle against *capitalism*, in which marxists always allotted a central role to the working class.

Some socialists may have promised that the overthrow of capitalism would *automatically* eliminate all social injustice. What they should have said, and what some did say, was that the overthrow of capitalism would remove an extremely powerful and insidious engine of inequality and irrationality – one incapable of giving new life to old oppressions.

The 'central' role of the working class in resisting and replacing capitalism derived from two basic ideas: firstly, workers could not be emancipated from above, but would have to free themselves or remain unfree; and secondly, by creating a 'collective labourer', capitalism itself created the potential of introducing a higher form of social production, reproduction and cooperation. Marx knew that workers were not necessarily more oppressed than others – but since their collective powers were essential to the reproduction of society they could lay the basis for an alternative.

The centrality of the working class in the overthrow of capitalism did not logically require its centrality in any other struggle. Its historic 'mission' was thus not 'unlimited' as Laclau claims – essentially it was to abolish itself as it built a classless society.

Of course socialism or communism added up to more than the simple absence of capitalist domination, though this was seen as a decisive element. 'Classical' socialists, including the 'Western Marxists', argued that socialists must combat militarism, the oppression of women, racism, and many other features of an unfree society. These may be linked to, but are not identical with, class rule. Doubtless today we can improve on their visions – but not by ignoring the need to end capitalist exploitation.

Does Laclau believe that 'radical democracy' can be realised without overthrowing capitalism? He offered not a single distinctly socialist objective. If the project of suppressing capitalism has been abandoned, then no doubt the more modest the role of the working class the better. If not, how is this to be done without the working class being involved, centrally?

Laclau offers himself as a philosopher whose concepts potentially reconcile and unite the various new social movements. In what sense does 'radical democracy' subsume the programme of the Greens or the peace movement? These movements are constituted out of an awareness of the deeply destructive forces present in the modern world and of the need to resist them. Laclau's new concepts lack the specificity required to identify either problems or solutions, and are therefore unlikely to prove very helpful.

The point is not to deny value to democratic rights or to dispute that the ideal of equality often went beyond bourgeois limits. The socialist project has been damaged when it has disregarded them. But that is not at all a reason for opting for a warmed up liberalism incapable of explaining the decisive structures of the modern world.

The social ethic of socialism does need to be clarified and reassessed but this scarcely means discarding the classic watchwords. There *is* a discourse of equality and rights here but its categories are more nourishing than those offered us by Laclau.

When the time comes to say 'farewell to the working class', I don't see that Laclau's work will help us; writers like André Gorz, Herbert Marcuse, Ursula Le Guin, Alec Nove, Raymond Williams have asked themselves what might lie beyond capitalism, and come up with a far more challenging vision.

Some may feel that Labour's current problems, the waning of French Communism, the rise of the Greens, the strength of the social movements, are signs that the old class politics is over and that Laclau is right. But this assumes that the traditional vehicles of working class politics were genuinely socialist in the past and that today the workers movement is incapable of finding renewal. Neither assumption is valid. The crisis of the bad old Labour politics potentially assists the birth of a socialism that may be closer to Marx, Morris or Pankhurst than anything the Labour Party has dreamt of.

Laclau argues that the new pattern of production and reproduction undermines the working class sense of collective identity, and that it is up to socialists to confect some new 'background image'. Yet throughout Europe the 'real movement' is much stronger than in Marx's day.

The British miners strike, the West German stoppage for a 35 hour week, social revolts this year in France and Spain, show that class struggle is not dead. Further afield – in South Africa, Poland, Brazil – struggles for democracy and equality have found added strength in a class basis.

The contrast between, say, Labour and the Greens is not that the former expresses 'class politics' while the latter does not. Under Kinnock's leadership Labour has sought to distance itself from any hint of class struggle and to stress that Britain's old order would be safe in its hands. It threw away the opportunity given to it by the miners to renew its own moral credentials as a socialist party. The German Greens, by contrast, are *against the system*.

The working class itself is ethnically and sexually diverse in its composition; this helps to make the labour movement a natural focus for the demands of women or blacks. Of course the 'social movements' need their independence because they can achieve real if limited progress *within* capitalism and, by itself, the overthrow of capitalism will not ensure the end of all injustice or oppression. But the labour movement remains a vital arena for advancing and clarifying the goals of the new social movements.

In Laclau's view the various currents of oppositional or reform Communism are hopelessly muddled: they don't realise that if they are committed to working class self-emancipation then they must also believe in an omniscient party and a one-party state. While 'false consciousness' becomes a taboo concept, such arbitrary interpretations are, apparently, permissable.

It is probably wrong to suppose that the workers movement has ever anywhere been sustained solely by class identity. While productive labour certainly played a vital part in the classic images of socialism, so did reproduction, the unity of peoples, human survival, a world without war, the fulfillment of human potential. The social movements can help to renew and extend socialist commitment to such goals. But they cannot substitute for the indispensable role of the working class itself in shaking off capitalism. I am glad that Ernesto still feels positive about May 1968 – but without the workers' action we would not then have been reminded of capitalism's mortality. ●

Robin Blackburn

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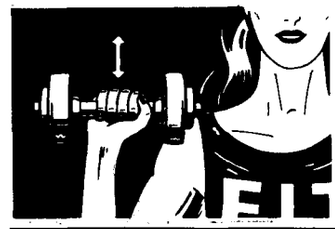

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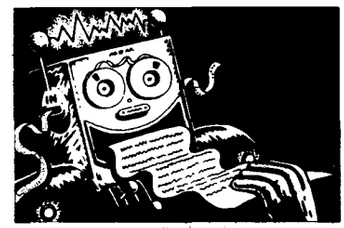

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● **Glasgow** Marxism Today Discussion Group meetings continue after the election. Further details: Charlie McInally, 147 Churchill Drive, Broomhill, Glasgow. G11. Tel: (041) 339 4422.

● **South Croydon:** Marxism Today recently formed. For details, phone Glenn (01) 680 0072.

● **Birmingham:** Britain's second city is now preparing for its second Left Unlimited style event. To be held on Saturday October 17th, help is particularly needed with organising workshops and debates. Like to make the big time? Contact Brum Unlimited, 25 Essex St Birmingham 5. Tel: (021) 692 1765.

● **North London:** Women-only Marxism Today Readers Group. Contact Sioned on 01 965 7482 or 01 609 4218.

● **Kensington and Chelsea:** Marxism Today Discussions postponed until after the election. First post-election analysis meeting Wednesday Aug 5th, 8pm at 42c Lancaster Road, London W11. Details from Brian Nicholls, Tel: (01) 229 7456.

● **Plymouth:** Marxism Today's left Unlimited in the Autumn. If you would like to help contact Nick Hubbard, Pillaton Cottage, Pillaton, Cornwall. Tel: (0579) 50074.

● **Manchester, Greater Manchester:** Marxism Today's Women Alive. To be held in the Salford area in the Autumn. Ideas and help most welcome. Please do get in touch with Jane, 1 Torbay Rd, Chorlton, Manchester. Tel: (061) 861 0985.

● **Teeside:** New group recently formed, for details of forthcoming activities contact: Andy Croft, 13 Emerson Avenue, Middlesborough, Cleveland TS5 7QW.

● **St Albans.** Gramsci Today, an event organised by St Albans Communist Party in association with Marxism Today, on Saturday October 31, at St Albans Town Hall. Further details from Sid Foggerty, 364 London Rd, St Albans, Tel: (0727) 23677.

● **Hemel Hempstead:** Inaugural meeting of Marxism Today discussion Group. A post election, all-party roundtable with speaker from Marxism Today Editorial Board. At Friends Meeting House, St Marys Road, Hemel Hempstead, Thurs July 9, 7.45 pm Further info: Dave Lee, (0442) 58396.

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Deadline for August issue:
13th of July 1987.

Further Enquiries and late copy: telephone Malcolm 01-608 0265. Box Number entries and replies are strictly confidential. Mark entries 'M.T. Hearts' and replies with the appropriate Box No. on the envelope. Please enclose a stamp for postage costs.

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Apology: In the June issue we mistakenly described John Wells as a member of the Communist Party. He is in fact in the Labour Party.

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Neil Kinnock

Network

Kinnock is still fighting

By the end of the general election campaign, Neil Kinnock had almost lost his voice, but he had not cracked. Although the Labour Party made a net gain of only 20 seats, Kinnock himself emerged with dignity – a bigger figure on the national stage than he had been before and one who, half-way through the campaign, had given the Conservatives the jitters.

His biggest single achievement was this: he came close to suggesting that there was an electable alternative to Thatcherism. He did not pull it off, but it certainly flickered across the national consciousness that a party seeking to promote a fairer society could win.

This is not the place to discuss why he failed, save to observe that there were too many obstacles stacked against him, including the divided opposition. The question is whether he has sufficient qualities to win in future.

Kinnock is, by any standards, an unusual man. It is peculiar to be at times the best orator in the country and, at others, to be among the world's worst wafflers. At times he preaches egalitarianism, yet at others becomes lyrical about the virtues of the meritocracy. One wonders what he would have been like if he had been at the University of Oxford, not Cardiff. More like a Thatcher than a Bevan, perhaps? Or another Harold Wilson?

When he opted for the non-nuclear defence policy, it looked like an act of conscience with bravado thrown in. He went even further than the bulk of the Labour Party had seriously demanded in seeking to deny the Americans the use of British bases. Yet afterwards he trimmed. The most damning charge against him here is that he did not know what he was doing.

On Europe – an issue that bedevilled the Labour Party for nearly 30 years – he won without a fight. The subject was not debated at the party conference last year: acceptance of British membership of the EC was slipped into the manifesto and has gone unchallenged. In the last few weeks the Labour group in the European parliament changed its leader from an anti-marketeer (Alf Lomas) to a pro-marketeer (David Martin). But it is hard to say whether all that was an act of tactical brilliance by Kinnock or whether he got away with it because the Labour Party wasn't looking. Very few people outside the party seem to have noticed that Labour's position on Europe has fundamentally changed; and perhaps not all that many within.

Kinnock came up through the Labour Left, yet since he became leader has spent much of his time attacking it: Scargill, Militant and, most recently, Sharon Atkin for her adherence to the campaign for black sections.

It is very easy to dismiss him as a lightweight, both from a left and right wing perspective. Tory Ministers believe that his attacks on Militant were a charade because the Militant Tendency is still around. He attacked Scargill only when the miners had gone back to work. And he fell into the trap of accepting Tory propaganda about loony town halls. Very few of the town halls are loony. When Kinnock went for them, he was allowing the Tories to dominate the debate. It is remarkable that he should regard Ken Livingstone as a potential enemy rather than a potential ally. Livingstone ended his time at the Greater London Council as a rather popular figure who at least tried to do something for the capital: for example, cheaper fares.

Yet the fact remains that, despite his weaknesses, Kinnock is still there, his position enhanced by the election campaign. His strengths are twofold. One is that he is the unchallenged leader of the Labour Party. The other is that he appeals to a large number of people for whom Thatcherism is too harsh a doctine.

The two go together. In the Labour Party Kinnock is beholden to no-one. He may have owed his election to the leadership largely to the unions which he had assiduously cultivated over the years, but he also owed it to constituency workers whom he cultivated as well. It was the Labour Party coalition, not a particular group, that elected him. There is no sign whatsoever of a belief that anyone else could have done better. Roy Hattersley, his rival for the leadership, has served him loyally and acknowledged early on that Kinnock was the right choice.

At his best, Kinnock is seeking to create another coalition in the country: between the haves and the have nots. In this he has never wavered. Every conference speech he has made as leader has stressed that Labour cannot hope to win on the basis of support from minority groups alone. The votes of the poor, the sick, the old, the unemployed and the otherwise disadvantaged are not enough, and in any case many of them do not bother to turn out. It is a matter of winning over more of those who are not too badly off.

The fact that the Conservatives still won no more than 42% of the vote, despite rising living standards for the majority, suggests that the task can be done. Kinnock had the right idea in emphasising that the twin priorities are the reduction of unemployment and the alleviation of poverty. The trouble was that not enough people believed he could deliver, and more than 20% of the electorate voted for the Alliance rather than Labour.

Shirley Williams once said that the Social Democratic Party was the last best hope for Britain. She was wrong. What must be true, however, is that Kinnock is the last best hope for Labour. He is only 45, learns very fast and, in the election campaign, gave the Tories a shock by reminding them that calls for a fairer society have not entirely lost their appeal. ●

Malcolm Rutherford

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